THE SHIP OF TRUTH

LETTICE ULPHA COOPER

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Margaret D. Kay

THE SHIP OF TRUTH

The Ship of Truth

by

Lettice Ulpha Cooper

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TRUTH*

Man with his burning soul
Has but an hour of breath
To build a ship of truth
On which his soul may sail, . . .
Sail on the sea of death, . . .
For death takes toll
Of beauty, courage, youth,
Of all but truth.

Life's city ways are dark,
Men mutter by: the wells
Of the great waters moan, . . .
Oh death! Oh sea! Oh tide!
The waters moan like bells, . . .
No light, no mark,
The soul goes out alone
On seas unknown.

Stripped of all purple robes,
Stripped of all golden lies,
I will not be afraid, . . .
Truth will preserve through death.
Perhaps the stars will rise,
The stars like globes; . . .
The ship my striving made
May see night fade.

"Philip the King, and Other Poems"
by John Masefield.

* *Reprinted from "Collected Poems" by John Masefield (Macmillan Company), by permission of the author.*

The title of the poem, as it appears in *"Collected Poems"*, is "Truth"—not "The Ship of Truth."

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PART ONE

"MAN WITH HIS BURNING SOUL"

I

As Clement Dyson came out of church after the morning celebration—he called it Mass in his own mind, but not, when he remembered, to his parish, because, although an Anglo-Catholic, he had no desire to be provocative—the east wind swept up the street to meet him, tearing between the uneven houses of yellowish-grey stone. The sky was the colour of dull steel, so that the smoke from the factory chimneys showed hardly greyer against it. It seemed to rest like a solid covering on the humped grey shoulders of the hills that rose up beyond the valley and rolled away behind the town, and on either side of it, hill upon hill as far as the eye could see. Some were dotted with straggling towns that clung to them like limpets to a rock, some were broken by chimneys and pit-shafts, others wore the unexpected grace of wood and pasture, others were crowned by long stretches of unbroken moorland, but all to the eye of Clement Dyson had the same air of secret and sullen savagery, as of a land that despised the men who made bold to live on it. A grim land it seemed to him, this West Riding of Yorkshire under an east wind, a land without pity, a land that nourished old feuds and old hatreds in its heart, as though beneath the roar of wheels and the tramp of workmen's boots it were listening still to the hoof beats of the moss troopers riding home from the wars.

He buttoned the cape of his cassock with chilled fingers, and hurried across the churchyard, the black skirts flapping around his long legs. He walked with his eyes on the ground, stooping a little forward. It was a habit that had

begun when he was a lanky schoolboy, growing much too fast to his full height. He remembered now his mother's, "Try to sit up, Clem", constantly recurring at the family dinner; remembered, too, his father once saying that in his time at Oxford it had been fashionable to walk with a slight stoop. That careless remark had undone all his mother's admonitions, and had invested the habit with a sort of permission, a faint halo of grown-up whims and splendours, so that, whether for that reason or not, he had never lost it, not even in the army. He straightened his shoulders, but they fell back unconsciously into their old position. Moreover, when he bent his head, the brim of his hat shielded his face from the harsh wind that made his skin feel dry and stiff and his eyelids smart.

If he was cold outside, he was still warm within from the comfort and sweetness of his daily Communion, and this reassured him, for lately he had discovered in himself signs of spiritual slackness. There had been mornings when he had failed to find, or at least to feel, contact with the Living Presence. There had been mornings when he had been impatient of the early rising, of the solitary service in the cold church without a server, and the impatience had so dulled his spirit that wonder, and even reverence, had been blunted. He had lost his sharpened awareness of that daily miracle that by grace he was able to perform, of God between his hands. He knew that this was to be expected. He had been taught that faith was not only a matter of the emotions. He had reassured the few penitents who came to him, had told them that such periods of spiritual dryness were in no way peculiar or surprising; they were temptations of the devil, and were to be dis-

regarded as such. They were experienced by all good Christians. Only, he had not before experienced one himself. He had not realized that the sense of desolation would be so strong, as though Joyce had died or gone away from him in the first year after their wedding. But this morning the heaviness had gone from his spirit. Once again his spiritual perceptions were awake; he had been able to apprehend God. He came out refreshed and strengthened and at peace with his world.

He came out to the rattle of clogs in the main street. The girls, young girls, mostly between fourteen and twenty, were going down to their work at Akeroyd's Mill, below Benton Hill. He reflected that clogs had almost disappeared now. It was only in one or two small towns such as this, and in some of the hill towns of Lancashire that they were worn, and then only when the roads were bad underfoot.

In the old days they had all worn them. He remembered so well that cheerful clatter in the frozen streets one day, just before Christmas, when he had been staying with his grandmother near Burnley. She had given him ten shillings to spend on his Christmas shopping—he was an exile from home because his sister had measles—and he had been climbing the road from the town with his arms full of parcels, when the mill gates were opened, and the footsteps of that clattering host smote upon his ears like the drums of an advancing army. He had drawn a deep breath of the frosty air and skipped in the road, parcels and all, transfused suddenly with a happiness that was like a golden wind, like a bird singing. Then, he remembered, the girls had all worn shawls over their heads, but now

the faces, round and red, or pale and sharp, were crowned by felt hats or velvet tam-o'-shanters, each cocked at a jaunty angle, and speared with a bright pin.

They came towards him in groups of three, or four, or five, arms linked, talking, shouting, giggling, indomitably cheerful, in spite of the early rising, the hurried breakfast, and the prospect of a long day of monotonous hard work. He felt, as he so often felt for his parishioners, a warm admiration for their sturdy gallantry. He knew most of these children. They had been in the church schools; they were in the Girls' Friendly, the working party, the Guides. The grins widened as he approached; the "Good morning, Mr. Dyson" came to him in the broad West-Riding voices. After he had passed them, he turned into the narrow ginnel that led to his own home. There was a short cut across a field from the vicarage to the church, but the path was a bog in bad weather.

The vicarage had been built in the days when the parson had his cob, and sat down to his bottle of port after dinner. It was of red brick, mellowed and softened by the passing years to a colour that even on grey days seemed to hold some warmth in it, like a fruit ripened by the sun. It stood square and sturdy in its acre of garden. It had a stable and a small yard behind, a sundial and shrubbery in front. It was a continual pleasure to Clement's eye every time he looked at it, but the pleasure had an element of remorse, for the house had no light and no bathroom. It was far too large; there were rambling passages and unexpected steps in dark corners. It was an impossible house to work without servants, and no servant would stay in it.

Poor Joyce! Clement felt ashamed of his pleasure in the house that imposed so many burdens on her, but the pleasure would not be denied. Impossible not to rejoice in that cobbled yard with the stone mounting block, and in the picture which it called up of the red-faced parson in his caped coat and cocked hat riding out on his white pony to dine with the Squire. Yet Clement sighed as he noticed again how the gate needed painting, and that one hinge was broken. The stables were used for a clubroom, and the boys were rough with it. The black shadow of dilapidations fell across Clement's mind. He stood, with his hand on the gate, considering the price of paint. He remembered with a smile how he had once been smacked for "popping" the sun blisters on a newly painted door of the rectory, his old home. Had his father, too, been thinking of dilapidations? He tried to remember, but could only recall a picture of the garden, and of children playing in it. It seemed to him so full of sunlight and riotous laughter that he shivered at the contrast, and hurried round the corner into the house.

II

"Come now," Joyce coaxed, "this one's a tiger." She held out the spoonful of porridge towards her daughter's mouth. Her own porridge was getting cold in her plate, and she was irritably aware that the bacon was also getting cold in the hearth, because they had no hot-water dish, and there was not much warmth in the gas fire.

"A tiger!" Mary repeated, her eyes round with excite-

ment. She opened her mouth and swallowed the spoonful. Joyce refilled the spoon. She wished Clem would come before the breakfast was stone cold. Some one must have kept him. She wished, too, that baby, in his high chair, would stop banging his plate with a spoon. The noise made her head ache. Still, it kept him good.

"Come," she said patiently, "this one's a cat."

Mary fended off the brimming spoon with one small hand.

"A pussy-cat?"

"Yes, of course."

"A black pussy-cat?"—this with an insinuating smile, and a lively hope that the thing might assume the proportions of a story.

"Yes. Now if you don't eat it up like a good girl, I sha'n't tell you what the other ones are. Oh, baby darling, hush! Well, never mind, if you're enjoying it."

She seized the opportunity to eat a spoonful or two of her own porridge, which was half cold and unappetizing. She had saved all the cream left from the children's porridge for Clement. She worried sometimes because he was so thin. She read the articles in the papers about keeping off influenza and pneumonia by taking proper nourishment, but although she tried to buy nourishing food, it often became so awful under the machinations of Doris, the maid, that neither she nor Clement could eat it. He was so good; he never grumbled, not like most men, like Daddy even, but she did wish she had more time to cook decent meals. She could cook much better than Doris, but when she left the children to Doris, or to her predecessors, something was sure to go wrong. She had

never forgotten the day when she had found Mary poking a piece of paper into the fire.

"Ready, Mary? This one's a horse."

There was Clement coming. She heard the hall door shut, and then his footsteps crossing the hall.

"Daddy!" Mary shrieked, pushing away the spoon, so that the porridge fell on to the tablecloth.

"Oh, Clem, don't talk to her! She's been so tiresome, and I do want her to finish this."

He looked so concerned that she was sorry she had spoken impatiently. She smiled at him.

"There's some bacon in the hearth. I'm afraid it's cold."

"You haven't had yours yet. I'll get it for you, and then I'll give Mary the rest of that. Hullo, old man!"

He patted his noisy son on the back and stooped down to the dishes in the hearth. As Joyce watched him, bending his immense black length over the plates, he suddenly seemed to her so pathetic and so dear that her throat ached, and unexpected tears came into the back of her eyes. She had been up for an hour and a half in the cold morning, boiling water, and dressing herself and the children. She was hungry, and baby's noise was staggering at this early hour.

"Here you are." He brought her the bacon.

"Oh, Clem, I wish you'd have yours first!"

"Plenty of time." He picked up the spoon. "Now, Mary, I'll tell you a tale, but when you stop eating, the tale stops. Once upon a time, there was a little grey puss-kitten that lived in a little house . . ."

"He likes telling her tales," Joyce thought, eating her bacon. "That's why he does it so much better than I do.

I've got no imagination. I only tell her things I remember having told to me, but he makes up something of his own, even a silly little tale like that. I wish he could write a book. Poor old boy, he never has time, he never sees any one who is interested in that sort of thing!"

"Oh, good, here's the post," she said aloud, as Doris came in with letters and a parcel. Michael shouted "Post", and dropped the spoon on the floor after a final ecstasy of drumming.

Joyce looked through her letters. A sales catalogue—that would be interesting by and by, when she had time. A bill—the little frown between her eyebrows deepened—a letter from Mrs. Dodgson—that would be about the materials for the bazaar—and the familiar square envelope in her mother's handwriting. She opened this and skimmed through the letter while she poured out some milk for Mary. ". . . Sending you a parcel . . . hope the woollies are the right size, . . . Dad has been in the house with a chill, but gone back to work again, . . . a very good concert, you would have enjoyed it, . . . take care of yourself, darling, in this bleak weather . . . my love to Clem and the babies. . . ."

Again she felt that horrible and unexpected pricking of tears. The letter had brought back to her with a rush the atmosphere of protection and comfort and freedom from care in which she had lived as a girl at home. For a minute she was homesick, she, the wife of Clement, whom she loved, and the mother of his children. She was horrified at herself. She drank some tea hastily, and began to undo the parcel.

There was a little woollen suit for Michael—her

mother's own knitting, in soft blue wool—a Shetland jersey for Mary, with a tasselled cap to match, a tin of shortbread, a couple of last week's illustrated papers, and underneath, wrapped in soft paper, a jumper for Joyce herself, of fine, almond-green wool, a good jumper, bought at a good shop, with a turn-down collar, and a floppy bow of thick, almond-green crêpe de Chine. Joyce cried out with pleasure, like a child. The pretty thing seemed to have changed the morning; its colour was like a promise of spring. It made her remember that her hair had yellow lights in it, and curled naturally, so that she did not need the permanent wave that she could never have afforded. With that easy spring of the heart towards hope and pleasure, she saw all the day in the light of the green jumper. She laughed at Michael and pretended to shake her fist at him, she lifted Mary down from her chair and kissed her. She said briskly to Clement:

"I'll soon clear these things away if you'll keep an eye on them for a few minutes. Have you time before you go into the schools? Then we'll turn out of here, and you sha'n't be disturbed."

She piled the cups on to the tray, and he carried it out for her. She ran upstairs to her bedroom with the jumper. She didn't try it on now, but she held it in front of her. Later she would try it on and gloat over it.

She went into the dining room for the kettle and toast rack. Clement was sitting on the floor, with Mary by his side and Michael sprawling over his legs. They were building a castle of bricks, and all three were intent upon it.

"They are all babies," she thought, and, with a little

wise smile, she went on into the pantry to wash up while Doris did the bedrooms.

III

After the half-hour in the schools, Clement went into the church to say Matins. When he had first come to the parish four years ago, he had rung the bell every morning before beginning, but as he found that no one ever came he gave it up. He knew that he was probably the only grown person in Barnsdyke who had time to go to church at half-past nine on a weekday morning. It was his business to keep the thread of praise and prayer rising for those who had no leisure. This morning he was glad to come back into the church, for he felt like a guest whose last visit had been happy, and who was sure of his welcome. He kneeled down at his desk with a sense of homecoming. This morning he did not have to watch himself to prevent the repetition of the familiar words from growing mechanical. They seemed like his own words, the channels of his own soul. There was no splendour, as at the Mass, of the Heavens opening and the Glory descending, but there was peace in the quiet flowing of his spirit towards God.

"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, be with us all evermore."

He crossed himself and sat back in his stall. He paused for a minute to bind that triple blessing to him before going about the day's business. As he sat there with his eyes on the opposite wall, he noticed for the first time

something which he had seen every day for four years, but had never realized before.

It was a stone tablet on the wall of the chancel above the choir stalls. It was a heavy thing of white marble, the edges rolled back like a scroll, the inscription cut in solid black lettering:

IN LOVING MEMORY OF

ELIZABETH ANN VERITY,

WHO WAS BORN ON DEC. 16TH, 1838,

AND DEPARTED THIS LIFE APRIL 23RD, 1849.

NOW WITH GOD.

He had sat opposite to it every day for four years, and it had never existed for him. Now suddenly it seemed to come alive. He counted up the years of Elizabeth Ann's life, and as he counted them, he saw a green lawn in front of a house, and a little girl running, a little girl in a narrow dress, with a deep flounce at the bottom, and her hair brushed back off her forehead and falling down behind, as he had seen in an old photograph of his mother. The green lawn stretched away behind the tablet, and the little girl came running towards the tablet that was waiting for her, although she did not know it—Elizabeth Ann Verity, now with God.

He wondered who had added those last three words with such calm certainty. Was it the parents who had lost her, comforting themselves by that definite assertion of her well-being? He thought of them as a middle-aged couple, grieving without bitterness, making for themselves

a picture of Elizabeth Ann in a traditional heaven of harps and angels. Probably they had never heard of purgatory, or if they had, they thought of it as a rather disreputable place inhabited by Roman Catholics—no place, certainly, for Elizabeth Ann, so lately running in the sunshine. Clement's mind went back to a night, three weeks ago, when he had been called out of bed in the small hours to baptize a baby born before its time. He had hurried, half-awake, through the dark, and had met the doctor on the doorstep, lighting a cigarette. The doctor had said to him:

"Too late, I'm afraid. The child's dead. The mother should be all right now."

He had gone into the kitchen, which seemed full of half-dressed women in a state of subdued enjoyment. He had spoken to the husband and father, who was sitting in a chair by the fire—one of the tenors in the choir, a loutish boy, who looked bewildered and heavy-eyed from the loss of his night's sleep. He had said:

"I'm sorry about it, Wilfred. I'm sorry I wasn't in time."

Wilfred had answered rather drearily:

"It doesn't matter. It would have died, anyhow."

He had asked whether any one had baptized it. No, no one had, they had been right upset, they hadn't known how. He had gone away, feeling sorry for the young wife who had had all her trouble for nothing, and sorry for Wilfred, the stupid, puzzled boy. It was a first child, and he knew how eagerly they had looked forward to its coming. He knew that Wilfred, at any rate, was wondering somewhere in the dim recesses of his mind why

this thing should have happened to him. He wished that he had been there in time to baptize the baby, so that they might have had the pleasure of a tombstone with a name on it. He was West Riding born and bred; he understood the importance of tombstones.

Now, as he sat in the church, he realized that he had thought only of the difference for the father and mother. He had not thought of any difference to the baby. He did not believe that there was any difference. A minute later he repudiated that belief with vigour. Of course it made a difference to an immortal soul if it received the grace of baptism on its brief passage through the world. That was the teaching of his Church, to which he belonged, and whose minister he was. Why had it seemed unreal to him? He put the thought away, but it came back, and with it the memory of the night when, as a small boy in bed in the night nursery, he had first speculated on death and eternity. He remembered his sheer terror of dying, and the hardly less terrifying thought of "for ever and ever", going on and on and on, like a train that wouldn't stop, rushing faster and faster and faster. . . . He had shrieked aloud, and nurse had come and given him a drink of water, and turned his pillow over. He had been glad to hear her scold him, and now, as he got up to leave the church, he looked again out of his daily life into the great void of eternity. He would have expected to see the Light Everlasting, but he only saw a great space of wind and water, and starting out to fly across it two souls, like small birds, that were Wilfred's unbaptized baby and Elizabeth Ann Verity.

He was still abstracted when he came out of church,

and walked as usual, with his head bent and his eyes on the ground, so that he did not see Rodney Perfect until he was almost abreast of him at the opening of the ginnel. He heard the cheerful "Hullo, Padre, good morning!" and looked up, smiling, as most people smiled, at sight of the jolly, fair face, the face red and tanned, and so clean that it looked as though when not out of doors it was always being washed. Clement half stopped and grabbed off his hat as he saw that Perfect had a lady with him. He realized that this must be the Mrs. Veronica Marston who was living with Perfect, and whose husband had just divorced her. He had an impression of a slender girl in a tweed coat, of a thick woollen scarf the colour of hyacinths, and of eyes of the same colour under the brim of a felt hat. Perfect did not stop, but called out "Cold as Christmas, isn't it?" over his shoulder as he walked on with the girl. Clement turned into the ginnel to go back to the vicarage.

IV

Veronica and Rodney climbed from the town by the road that wound up to the Grange between walls of unmortared stone. Rodney whistled and swung his stick, and observed as he prodded a crevice in the stones:

"Well, now all that damnable business is over, we'll be married."

"Will we?" She did not seem to move fast, but she kept pace very easily with his long strides.

"Of course we will—what d'you take me for?" He

spoke lightly, and then glanced at her and added more seriously, "Don't you want to?"

"I don't know. Yes, I think I wouldn't mind."

"You wouldn't mind!" He stopped, and she stopped. He took her by one slim shoulder and turned her towards him.

"See here, Nicky, don't you want to belong to me for ever and ever, like they say in the story books?"

She shook her head, laughing at him.

"My dear Rodney, there's no belonging about it. I only belong to myself."

"Well, I don't mean that," he said, not knowing that he had. "Don't you want to live with me for ever and ever?"

"I do now, but——"

"But what?"

"But there was a time when I wanted to live with Claud for ever and ever."

"Oh, damn Claud!" he cried. "You didn't know anything then—you were only a kid."

"Twenty-two, Rodney, and not a young twenty-two."

He looked at her, half annoyed and half admiring.

It was so like her to remind him in that candid way that he wasn't the only man she had ever loved. She stood facing him, her hands in the pockets of her coat like a boy's, her body as slim and straight as a boy's—yet she was not in the least like a boy; she was the most feminine thing he had ever known. He had never imagined that anybody could have such hidden reserves of warmth and sweetness, that any woman could be such an incomparable lover. As he stood looking at her, he said "Damn Claud!"

again, because he wanted her all for himself, and she laughed at him, and they walked on together.

She said, "About this marrying. I'm quite willing if you want to."

"Well, I do want to," he said. "It's the decent thing to do—and I think it's better for you."

"Rodney, I believe you want to regularize my position."

He flushed under his fair, healthy skin.

"What if I do? You know yourself it would make some things easier for you. And besides—suppose we had any children, it would be better for them."

"Would you like us to have some?"

"Yes—if you would—not unless."

"I would, I think—one, anyhow."

"Well, then, you can see it would be better for them, or it."

"I can't worry too much about a creature that doesn't exist, but I think you're probably right. I think I owe it to you." She looked up at him with a twinkle of the hyacinth-blue eyes.

"You're awfully respectable at heart, Rodney."

He flushed again, but——

"Well, why not?" he said sturdily. "Isn't it better to be respectable—within limits?"

Her feeling was that people did not always keep their respectability within limits, but she only said:

"Yes, I daresay it is. It suits you, anyhow, and it suits the house. I think I owe it to the house to be married if I'm going to live there."

They had come in sight of the Grange. It had been built at the same time as the parsonage, and of the same

red brick. It had the same warm, solid, welcoming air, standing four-square among the grace and delicacy of the leafless trees. It was a house for fires and a Christmas tree, for school-room tea, and cricket lunches—decidedly, Veronica thought, a house in which one ought to be married. And though she loved the house as she loved Rodney, she felt for a moment as though both of them were constraining her.

"I'll see the Padre about it," Rodney said vaguely.

"The thin man with the nice eyes? Will he do it?"

"Oh, I think so. He's a very decent fellow. Rather High Church, but I don't think he's got any bees in his bonnet."

"But, you know, I don't think their bishops allow them to do it."

"Oh, the bishops don't trouble their heads about that sort of thing now. They're too busy altering the Prayer Book. Besides," added Rodney vaguely, "they have to move with the times."

Veronica had not much confidence in his ecclesiastical knowledge, but still less in her own.

"Well, I hope it's all right."

Rodney opened the swing gate for her.

"If he won't do it, I'll get somebody else."

"There are always registry offices, you know. Are you so keen on having it done in church?"

"Yes—I don't know—I think it counts more."

He shut the gate, and thought as she walked a few steps ahead of him how perfectly she moved, and how, in either town or country clothes, she looked just right, as though they belonged to her.

She said, considering:

"I wonder why you think that. You don't ever go to church, do you, Rodney?"

"I haven't for some time—— But I—I don't know——"

He found it difficult to explain, even to himself, that although he did not go to church, he liked church to be there. He thought it was the sort of thing that ought to be there, like the King and the Houses of Parliament. He had a dim feeling that it was rather nice for women to go to it, and perhaps children. Also, although the Grange had only been bought by his father, he had acquired a relic of feudal feeling about his own particular church. He sent flowers to the Harvest Festival, and money in answer to occasional appeals, and pheasants and champagne to the vicarage at Christmas. It would have been difficult to say whether there was any germ of faith or reverence among his vague feelings.

Veronica's voice, with a soft chuckle in it, broke into his thoughts.

"I believe you like church because you think it's respectable."

He looked down at her, and answered with an unusual flash of insight.

"I believe that's why you don't like it."

"I expect you're right." She ran up the steps of the porch and turned to face him, smiling mischievously.

"I'm not very respectable, am I, Rodney?"

Under the drooping brim of the felt hat her face, ordinarily pale, glowed with the pure, vivid colour that came into it easily from exercise or excitement. He

thought her eyes were like flowers, if flowers could twinkle. He sprang up the steps and caught her in his arms.

"You're the loveliest thing in the world."

He opened the door, and they went into the house together.

V

Clement spread out a packet of foolscap on the dining-room table, and sat down to write his sermon. It was an occupation that he usually enjoyed. He had always liked writing, and had used words with pleasure, with a sense of their value and weight and colour. He had produced good verses at school, had scribbled poetry and short sketches at Oxford, and had written one or two poems in France. With the end of the war, the impulse to write poetry had left him. Events had followed quickly in his life, examinations, his ordination, a curacy in a Liverpool parish under a strenuous vicar, Joyce, his engagement, the new living in Yorkshire, his marriage, Mary and Michael. He was not an idle parson. Parish and family so filled up his time that his private tastes and occupations were crowded into the background. He often thought that he ought to read more, but when he had an hour or two to spare, there were odd jobs to do in the house or garden, or he could relieve Joyce of the children.

He had made up his mind to preach this week on the necessity for frequent Communion. The handful of people in church struck him afresh every Sunday morning

with a sense of failure and discouragement. He pulled a sheet of paper towards him, and wrote across the top, "Man shall not live by bread alone."

He laid down his pen and stared at the words, and at the blank space below them. He thought:

"How shall I make them see it? How shall I make them see that what really matter are not the things of their everyday life—the mill, the house, the work, the child-bearing, the beer, the betting—but their creation, their redemption, their hope of everlasting life? How can I make them feel it? How can I make them see that the miracle of Bethlehem is performed again every day in their midst, and they will not trouble even to be present?"

He took up the pen again and underlined the text.

"That's true enough," he thought. "There isn't any one content with bread alone. There isn't any one who doesn't want something beyond the necessities of life, if it's only the excitement of backing a horse, or watching a football match. We're all unsatisfied. How can I make them see that in the Catholic faith is everything that would satisfy them? . . ." And suddenly the thought crossed his mind, "Is it? Does it? Am I satisfied?"

He leaned back in his chair, very still, staring at the white sheet of paper before him that mocked him with its emptiness. A queer sensation of dismay was rising in his heart.

"I am. I could be. If I am not, it's my own weakness and indolence, my own unfaithfulness."

He took up the pen again. "Sometimes I'm more than satisfied—filled wholly and completely. It can't always be

the same. It's absurd to expect to be always on the same spiritual level."

He began to draw on the blotting paper little shapes like birds flying. He thought . . .

"They don't give themselves a chance to be satisfied. They are like those natives in the famines in India who will not eat strange food, and starve to death with food all round them. How to wake them, stir them up, sting them alive?"

He remembered once in his youthful days in Liverpool asking a neighbouring vicar if dissent was strong in his parish, and the vicar replying dryly, "Not so strong as indifference." Yes, that was the enemy—a deadweight of good-natured apathy. It was the same with everything in the parish. He started societies, cricket clubs, boy scouts. His parishioners enrolled in them, came for the first six months, tried to run them, quarrelled, got tired of them, and came no more. "I can't keep anything going," he thought. "It's hopeless." Then, "After all, why should they do these things if they don't want to? It isn't as though they had such easy or self-indulgent lives!" He had started a Young Men's Club to keep the young men out of the public houses. "But, dash it all!" he thought. "If I was a young man and wanted to go into a public house, I should go, and tell the parson to mind his own business."

He pulled the paper towards him with determination. At least it was his business to see that they came to Communion on Sunday mornings. But then Sunday, he knew, was their once chance of a long lie. They must be up early every day of their lives to go off to work, to get break-

fast for the men going off to work, and the children going off to school. Sunday was the one intermission in the ceaseless toil of lives whose security depended on that toil. It was very hard to expect them to get up at seven. He had suggested a parish Mass at 9.30, and had met with a storm of protests. He knew that if he urged them to make their Communion at the 10.30 service, they would have breakfast first.

A sudden wave of impatience swept over him. He got up and began to walk about the room. Why did the Church make things so difficult for ordinary people? Why was everything so hedged about with restrictions? Was it really better that people should stay away from Communion than that they should come after breakfast or in the evening? Why didn't the Church understand that working men and women had hard lives, and wanted to lie abed on Sundays? Christ would have understood. It was those ordinary lives in ordinary things that He always had understood. Why then didn't His Church understand? What was wrong with it?

Clement stopped suddenly, as though he had pulled himself up short on the verge of a precipice. It was not for him to dispute the Church's authority. His business was to obey, even if he could not understand. Lately, something had gone wrong with his obedience. It was no longer unquestioning. There was a feeling of irritation in the bottom of his mind. It was an uncomfortable state for one who had always been unusually single-hearted. He sat down in his chair, closed his mind to these distracting thoughts, and began to write his sermon.

Clement set out in the afternoon to visit in Ranter's

Fold. The world was still grey under the east wind. He walked up the winding main street of Barnsdyke, and turned aside into a narrow, paved court that ran along the front of a row of stone cottages. They had been built in the early days of evangelical fervour, the days when colliers and labourers had stood by hundreds with tears running down their faces while Wesley or one of his disciples preached to them. "Extraordinary!" Clement thought. He remembered the parish mission which he had organized the year before. He had put weeks of prayer and energy and thought into it, and the result, so far as he could see, had been a few extra services and devotions for the small proportion of his parish that already came to church. The Father from Mirfield who had conducted the mission had been an eloquent preacher, with warm sympathies, and a wide knowledge of his fellow men. Yet it was impossible to imagine a large congregation of miners and workmen moved by any sermon of his to tears or to conversion.

Clement wondered what would convert them. A national upheaval? The war had not done it. Roman Catholicism? The Protestants spoke of it as a potential danger, but it was a thing too alien to the English blood. Its discipline was repugnant to an independent people, its precision suspect to a nation always suspicious of technique in government, art, or religion. What then could convert them? Some new and vital form of dissent, some prophet rising from among themselves? It seemed to Clement that no prophet could arise who would embody their careless good nature, their self-consciousness, their humorous detachment, their pluck, their sentiment. If one did arise, he

would be removed from them by the mere fact of becoming a prophet. He would pass for ever into the large region of things which they regarded with tolerant contempt. He would prophesy, and they would work, eat, sleep, drink beer, bet on horses and dogs, and go to watch dirt-track racing and football matches. Between him and them there would be a great gulf fixed.

Clement knocked at the door of the first house. A woman opened the door to him, her sleeves rolled back, her arms floured up to the elbows. Under the checked pinafore, the knitted jumper, and cloth skirt, her body had a curious bulging shapelessness, but her face was pleasantly red, and her eyes lively and kind.

"Oh, it's you, Mr. Dyson. Come in and sit you down. I'm just baking a bit of oven bread for our tea."

"Shall I be in your way, Mrs. Poppleton?" Clement asked, hesitating on the doorstep. He had never acquired the confident manner of the visiting parson. He was acutely aware that there were times when he himself would not have liked to be visited.

"No, no," Mrs. Poppleton repeated hospitably. "Come right through into the kitchen—if you'll excuse me being so untidy. Rube was playing this morning, and that threw me, having him about the 'ouse. 'E's only on half-time now, you know, Mr. Dyson. They can't do with 'im for more."

"That's bad luck."

"Ah. There's some as is out altogether, so we can't complain, can we? I'm one of the lucky ones. I've Mr. Poppleton in good work, and there's Alice as is earning something already with her millinery. Set up with it

she is. 'Mother,' she says to me, 'you can't go about in that old hat, not with a milliner in the family'—and she was for making me a new one out of black panne—velvet, you know—but I tell her if she wants to make her mother a figure of fun, she'd better wait until 'er wedding day. Nor that won't be so long, neither. She's a one for the boys, is our Alice. Not but what she's a good girl. I've never 'ad a back word from her, and that's more than many a mother can say nowadays."

She was kneading the flour, as she talked, with her big, capable, red hands. The little kitchen was stuffy and warm, and smelled of apples and damp wool, for a shirt belonging to one of the male Poppletons was hanging on a string near the fire.

"Alice was very good about helping with the bazaar," Clement said.

"She reckons a lot to the church, does Alice. On Saturday night she was that tired, I said to her, 'Why don't you have a real good lay in tomorrow, Alice?' but 'Oh, no, Mother,' she says, 'I must go to church. I didn't go last Sunday, and what would Mr. Dyson say?' Yes, she reckons a lot to you, does Alice."

Mrs. Poppleton looked up at him across the bowl of flour.

"You look starved, Mr. Dyson. Come nearer the fire. 'Ow's Mrs. Dyson keeping?"

"Very well, thank you."

"I've not seen 'er about lately, but I've not been out much myself."

"She's been very busy. She's a good deal tied by the children."

"They do tie you." Mrs. Poppleton agreed philosophically. "It's nothing but one thing after another when they're small—— But there—we wouldn't be without them. You've a bonny little girl, Mr. Dyson. She come up to me last time I saw her and spoke to me so friendly."

Clement smiled, the quick, pleased smile of the proud father.

"Yes, Mary is a friendly soul. I think she knows every one in the place."

"That's right," Mrs. Poppleton agreed. She put the round cakes of dough into the oven and slammed the door on them. "Now I'll get you a cup of tea—I'll just wash my hands first."

"I'm afraid I can't stop." Clement stood up. "I have to be getting on." He smiled at Mrs. Poppleton. "I should like to stay awfully, but I have some more people I ought to see."

"Well, please yourself," Mrs. Poppleton said comfortably. She was sorry for him, though she could not have explained why. She was not sorry for his struggling circumstances, for it would never have occurred to her that they were struggling. She thought of him as comparatively rich, and living in a large house. That his wife should be tied by the children and the housework seemed to her natural—a matter for sympathy, but not surprise, since it was the common lot of women. She thought of him also, in a vague way, as having a secure job. A parson would not get turned off when times were bad, nor have to live for weeks on the dole, because of dim, incomprehensible happenings. He had no misfortunes as she understood misfortunes, yet she was sorry

for him. Her instinct went beyond her understanding, and told her that he had difficulties, troubles, problems beyond her ken.

Suddenly he said to her:

"Mrs. Poppleton, why don't you and your husband come to church sometimes with Alice and Reuben?"

He stood looking down at her rather unhappily, troubled by what he suddenly felt to be an impertinence. Of course, it was his business to get people to come to church. He had gone about it in his Liverpool parish with enthusiasm, and it had been the same here until lately, when he had developed a new sensitiveness about it. He had been so anxious to persuade men and women to share in the faith for which he lived, and to which his whole life was directed, that he had pleaded with them urgently, without shyness or hesitation, with pride and ardour, as though he were offering them the half of his kingdom. Now he found that he could not do it without an effort. He had thought before only of what he was offering them, but now he began to think of them—whether they would resent his interference, whether he had a right to interfere with them, whether what he offered was what they wanted —but of course it was what they wanted. In their narrow and insecure lives, they wanted happiness and romance and security, and the Catholic faith was happiness and romance and security, for this world and the world to come.

Mrs. Poppleton replied:

"Well, you see, Mr. Dyson, on Sunday morning I've the dinner to get, and Mr. Poppleton, 'e likes to stay in and rest. We're neither of us so young as we were. And

then, we've not been for so many years, we should feel strange like. But if we don't come, you mustn't think as we've anything against you. When there was some talk about you starting new ways with the services, Mr. Poppleton said, 'Well,' 'e said, 'you can't go on for ever in a mill with the same machines and the same old ways. The manager will change them when they get out-of-date, and it's the parson's job to do the same in the church.' Yes, 'e said that, did Mr. Poppleton, and we're both right glad that the young ones have taken to it. We'd never do aught to prevent them, and any time you come here, we're pleased to see you and welcome."

"If you are glad for them to go, why don't you want to come too?"

Clement looked at Mrs. Poppleton with a half-imploring perplexity. He was always coming across parents who were eager for their children to go to church, but would not dream of going themselves. It was one of his greatest problems, for it meant that the children thought of church-going as part of a condition of tutelage, and abandoned it at the age of fourteen, on coming to man's estate.

Mrs. Poppleton looked at Clement as though out of the depths of a larger wisdom. She listened to him very much as she would have listened to the importunate requests of one of her own children. She thought him a right nice lad, good and hard working, but she had long ago ceased to think any man very wise. She had married one, borne three, and buried one. She was used to them from the first stirrings in the womb, to the last stillness in the coffin. Clement did not know how to urge her. He knew unconsciously that she was poised, and he was not; she

was adjusted to life, while he was still trying to get his bearings. He said:

"Don't you think you could come sometimes?"

"Well, I'll think about it," she said, much as she would have said "We'll see", when one of the young ones asked her if there would be bacon for breakfast.

When she had shut the door, Clement walked away with a sense of failure, almost of self-reproach, as though subconsciously aware that his missionary efforts had lacked conviction. He had some houses to visit in another street. At the entrance to the court, he looked up at the name on the wall. Ranter's Fold! Would some old ranter have succeeded where he had failed, have convinced Mrs. Poppleton of the thirst of her soul for living waters? Would he have effected an instantaneous conversion of Mr. Poppleton, foreman at Akeroyd's Mill, humorous of eye, racy of speech, noted for his recitations in the Yorkshire dialect? By what power had he compelled them and their like, so that even their streets were called by his name? By the power of the Holy Spirit? Why, then, did not the same power abide in the Church to-day, so that her ministers might compel men with no uncertain sound?

Clement looked back at the dwellings of Ranter's Fold as though some answer might come to him from the grey stones, as though he would evoke the spirit of the ranter to his aid, but if the spirit lingered there, his own found no contact with it. The stones remained as silent and unanswering as the hills out of which they were quarried in those old days, when by some strange ways the hearts of labouring men were marvellously turned towards God. Clement suddenly felt himself an alien and an intruder

in that place. He accused himself of growing fanciful as he turned and walked away from it.

VI

In the library at the Grange after dinner, Veronica Marston lay back in a big armchair and watched Rodney fiddling with the wireless. He sat on a hassock with his back to her, twirling knobs and producing fragments of tunes and strange, discordant sounds. Veronica thought how terribly she loved him. She looked at his straight, square shoulders in the dinner jacket, and at his fair, close-cropped head, so well set on those shoulders. She could see the bowl of his pipe sticking out sideways, making a little column of blue smoke that rose up before the great mouth of the loud speaker, as though he were offering incense to his god. And as the oracles in the ancient temples had responded to their worshippers, so did the loud speaker respond to Rodney, foretelling wind and rain, promising the sunshine, giving news, giving advice, instruction, and amusement, marshalling the great ones of the world before him, showing him the kingdoms of the earth and the glory thereof—giving far more generously than any oracle. Sometimes it gave too generously for Rodney, who did not want advice or instruction, and treated the great ones of the world with scant courtesy, switching them off in the middle of a sentence. What he enjoyed were the dance bands and the comedians, but he enjoyed still more twisting and turning the handles, and filling the room with hideous sounds.

Rodney said over his shoulder:

"I'm getting Cartagena."

The scrapings and squeals subsided. A familiar tune came from the loud speaker with definite assurance. Rodney turned round, squatting on his heels.

"That's that thing out of 'Carmen.' Do you remember, Nicky?"

Veronica nodded. Both leaned forward, smiling, to listen. Both were remembering a bay on the southern shore of France, and an evening when they had walked together down a narrow path through a wood of pines, while the band on the terrace above them played the "Habanera." They looked at each other, and their eyes rejoiced. Veronica thought to herself, "That was my perfect night, the night I was made for." It was the night before she had gone away with Rodney, the last night, technically speaking, of her innocence. It seemed to her that now for an instant in the panelled, firelit room, she recaptured that perfection. She had a sense of a moment of happiness so exquisite and so fragile that any movement, any word, might break it. It was Rodney who broke it. He turned round and twirled the wheel. The "Habanera" came to an untimely end, stifled as though a hand had been clapped over the mouth of the singer.

"Damn, I've lost it," Rodney said. "I'll put in another coil to-morrow."

He switched off and went over to the table by the window.

"A drink, Nicky?"

"No, thanks."

He mixed himself a whisky and soda, and came back to the hearthrug.

"Rodney, does the wireless make you feel solemn?"

"Eh? No—why?"

"It does me, because it makes it seem as though nothing came to an end. Take a song—I always thought it was over when the singer had finished singing—but it isn't, you see. It goes wandering over the world, getting farther and farther away, and any one can catch it and hear it."

"Well, and what of it?" Rodney asked, finishing the whisky and soda. He was not bored. It interested him to hear her talk of things he had never thought of. It was one of the things that made her such good company, her way of looking at everything and seeing more in it than other people saw, her way of finding something funny or exciting in it where other people didn't.

"Well, suppose everything is like that? Suppose nothing ever dies, not even our thoughts? Suppose all our thoughts go flying away from us across the world till some one else catches them?"

"The fellow that stops my thoughts won't empty his batteries."

"But it is a solemn thought, isn't it? It makes everything we do so permanent."

Rodney looked down at her, smiling. She was lying back in the big chair, her arms hanging over the sides, her slim legs stretched out, the short skirts of her black frock ruffled up to her knees. She had a cigarette between her reddened lips, her eyes were half closed. She looked both bored and rakish.

"You are a funny girl, aren't you?" Rodney said.

"It's a funny world," she murmured. "I sometimes think it's too large. I could do with it smaller."

He sat down on the arm of her chair and put his arm round her.

"It is small to-night," he said. "There's just room in it for the two of us, Nicky, and the rest can go hang. Do you care about it? I don't. I don't give a damn for it when I've got you. What does it matter where our thoughts go? They can go to hell for all I care."

"Oh, Rodney, I hope they won't go there!" she laughed, but she too stopped feeling that it mattered. Only, as he held her close in his arms, she had a fleeting vision of permanence, of their thoughts and their love going out from them like their breath, and spreading in widening circles through the darkness.

VII

Clement lay still and wakeful in the bed by the window, looking through the window at the square of sky, a dark sky with hurrying clouds that obscured the stars. Joyce lay warm and drowsy in the bed by the wall. She was nearly asleep, but she was listening subconsciously for Michael, who was cutting a tooth, and had been awake, crying, several times that evening. She had grown so used to this, first with Mary and then with Michael, that some part of her listened for them even when she was fast asleep. The first cry would bring her to the cot, still three parts asleep, but able in that state to turn Michael over, plump up his pillow, pat his back and sing to him in a soothing murmur, hoping that he might go off again

before he was really wide awake. Neither she nor Clement had learnt the modern scientific methods of bringing up babies with wisdom and reticence. They both obeyed their blundering instincts, and rushed to them when they cried, and if they went on crying, took them out of the cot and walked up and down with them, sure that there must be something wrong. Both Mary and Michael had learnt before they were three months old that a loud, continued wailing was as good as whistling for a taxi, and both practised it whenever they were bored with lying still and felt the need of transport.

Clement was tired, but he could not sleep. His mind was troubled by hurrying thoughts, and his body disturbed by a natural longing for the body of Joyce, divided from him by a few yards of floor. They had decided that they could afford no more children, and since the Church disapproved of birth control, they had no choice but to practise that abstinence approved by St. Paul. Joyce did not mind. She was always so tired by bedtime, and she had to get up so early in the morning. Above all things, she did not want another baby. She had been overjoyed to have Mary, pleased to have Michael; she adored both of them, but she did not feel that she could do it again. She could not forget the long toil of those months before Michael was born when she had sometimes been without a servant, when Mary, cutting her teeth with difficulty, had made constant demands on her energy, and alarmed her inexperience. It had not hurt Michael—he was stronger than Mary, and she herself had had an easier time—but never since then had she felt quite free from tiredness. Sometimes she thought that she was a poor

thing. She knew so many women, workmen's wives, who went on year by year having one baby after another, a new baby before the last one could walk alone, and doing all the work of the house and looking after the older children—it made her tired to think of it. She was grateful to Clement for sparing her, as their husbands did not spare them. Her love for him was neither lessened nor spoilt, but if anything, intensified. It had always been a deep-seated affection, with more tenderness than passion.

The bar upon their intimacy had made more difference to Clement, but it was not that chiefly that troubled him to-night. At first, his mind turned over again the problems of the day—the deficit in the Church expenses fund, the accounts of the Men's Club, a dispute between the organist and the tenors in the choir, the difficulty with the scouts, who had turned up so regularly in their first year, and so irregularly ever since, the difficulty with a parishioner who had left the church because of Popish practices, and wrote regularly to the bishop about them. All these things went round and round in Clement's mind, till he felt as though they were a wheel and he were bound to it. He was losing the power to escape from them. Worse still, he was losing his perpetual consciousness of what lay behind them. His spirit was growing dulled by constant routine, by the ceaseless round of small duties. Yet what was the life of man but routine and small duties? If his spirit were quenched by them, his spirit carefully tended and nurtured daily from the Living Flame, what of the spirits of those who were his charge?

He would break through this dullness that had fallen upon him. He would purge his mind of slackness and

conquer it by the strength of his will. He gathered all the powers of his will and lifted up his soul towards God. Suddenly in the darkness, he was afraid, for though he called upon God, he could not reach Him. Once, early in his schooldays, he had come home for the holidays by an unusual train, owing to some sudden alteration in the time-table. All the way home he had thought of the lighted house and the warm fires and the good tea ready on the table, and when he got back the house was empty and dark, his father out in the parish, his mother at a sewing meeting, the younger children out to tea, no meal ready —he remembered the utter desolation of his arrival. It was the same desolation he felt now, only sharpened by fear and anguish. Again he summoned all the powers of his will and reached out towards God, but there was no answering sense of comfort and security in his own heart, no kindling of faith, no quickening of his soul. The thought came to him, "What if God was not there?" It was the first time it had come to him as a part of his personal experience, and it shook him to the centre of his being, so that the sweat started on his body, and his hands gripped the bedclothes. The terror that seized him was like the terror of that night when he had first discovered eternity. His body rigid, his soul in agony, he cried out, hardly forming the words in his mind: "God! God! Where are you, come quickly!" just as he had cried out, "Nurse! Nurse! Where are you? Come quickly!" on that night.

And suddenly it seemed that there was an answer to his cry. Some link was formed in his mind, an association

made, a familiar memory drew near. It came with an image of a crowded room, a platform, an orchestra, a conductor, voices singing, "He trusted in God that He would deliver Him. Let Him deliver Him, if He delights in Him." It blended and changed into a sight of printed words on the page of a prayer book—words that had stuck early in his memory because of their strange sound—"Eloi, eloi, lama Sabacthani." He had asked what they meant when he first saw them, and had remembered, though he was not very old. They came to him now like a hand touching his, or a voice speaking in the darkness. He was no longer alone, appalled by the strangeness of his fear, shut off from the rest of the world in a terrible isolation. He was only going where his Master had gone before him. He had a sudden sense of Christ as a near and living Presence. Strange that in the moment when he seemed to have lost God he should have found Him.

His body relaxed and he lay more easily, relief flowing over him. His terror receded; a blessed quietness filled all his mind like the relief after pain. He began to recite one of the Litanies of the Holy Spirit, courting sleep by the repetition. He heard the church clock near by strike midnight, and stopped to count the strokes. He was growing drowsy, and the chimes stirred a host of random recollections in his mind. The ringing of the Devil's Knell at midnight on Christmas Eve . . . Oxford . . . the witching hour of midnight. Into the Litany of the Holy Ghost crept a verse of an old Litany remembered from a Christmas carol:

"From ghoulies and ghosties,
Long leggity beasties,
And things that go bump in the night,
Good Lord, deliver us."

His terror had stood apart from him and become no more than a long leggity beast, a ghoulie or ghosty. Across his drowsy brain drifted a picture of an O.U.D.S. performance of the "Midsummer Night's Dream" in Magdalen gardens, and of Puck in the moonlight sweeping the grass with his broom of twigs. The last deep chime sounded, and the sound slipped away from it to travel through the dark. Clement turned on his side and fell fast sleep.

VIII

Clement and Joyce sat opposite each other in the corner of the railway carriage. The train which was taking them to Melchester was a slow train, stopping at every station, but to both of them, a day away from the parish, a day out, was so rare a treat that they did not mind. Joyce had an occasional qualm as to whether Michael were having a screaming fit, or Mary getting too near the fire, but she dismissed the thought of these things, because she was determined to enjoy herself, and determined that Clement should enjoy himself. She had thought him so often looking worried and unhappy lately. Clement was equally determined that none of his perplexities should prevent Joyce from enjoying the day. Both of them were exhilarated by the mere fact of a change, of going to another place away from their daily duties.

"How long will your shopping take you?" Clement asked.

"Oh, not more than an hour. I want some shoes for Mary, and a new porridge pan, and one or two little things."

"Well, you'll want to have a look at the shops, won't you? Shall we meet for lunch at a quarter to one? We'll go to the Victoria."

"Oh, Clem, ought we? We could go to a café. Isn't the Victoria very expensive?"

"Not if you have the lunch. There's a very good lunch for 4*s.* 6*d.* I went there last year with your father."

"That's nearly ten shillings—more with tips and something to drink," she said, half seriously—but he knew that she wanted to go.

"Never mind," he said, smiling. "It's months since we had a day out together. We'll go a bust, and do ourselves proud. I haven't got to be at St. Paul's till five, so we might see what's on at the pictures."

Seeing her so unwontedly pink and sparkling under her little felt hat, he felt a pang of remorse because he was not able to give her more treats.

"If I could only make some money," he thought, "write articles for the *Church Times* or something, we'd send the children to her mother, or get somebody to look after them—and I'd take her somewhere for a real holiday. We could go on one of those cheap tours abroad—France, Belgium, Italy."

He looked out of the window at the wide, rolling countryside, hill falling to valley, valley rising again to hill, but all covered with straggling towns and villages, built

of the grey-yellow stone, all crossed by bus routes and tram lines, carrying men from their homes to the day's work, all shadowed by the grey smoke from that work. He said to Joyce:

"You know, the contours of the land are lovely. I should like to have seen it before it was spoilt—when it was really 'England's pleasant pastures green.'"

"It's not beautiful now," Joyce said, but without bitterness. She hated it, but she was too happy to be bitter this morning.

"I don't know. It's got a kind of grim beauty of its own. At night, when you can see the fires of the forges, and the lamps of the towns dotted about all over—and the hills so dark and quiet behind them. And there are beautiful things in it. Look at those two chimneys there, against the blue sky. They're perfect—so strong and slender. Any one could see it if they were in Athens or Florence, but here there are so many of them, we don't notice."

"There are enough of them, certainly," Joyce agreed, but she was smiling at him, pleased to hear him talk as he had not talked lately, following his own fancies, with his eyes so alive and bright.

"It's extraordinary how little people outside—people in the South or in the Midlands—know about this part of the world," he went on. "They don't understand a bit how much closer together we all live—how much more we see of one another. I think if a revolution ever does come, it may make a great change in the conditions up here, but it will make less change in the relationships than anywhere in England. We're all so much less sepa-

rate. We really do almost take one another naturally. That's why people come up here from the South, and say that what they call the working classes are rude and off-hand, and haven't any manners."

The train was running between warehouses and factories, and dingy streets, festooned with washing. Joyce picked up her handbag and umbrella, Clement reached for his hat on the rack. As they stood up together in the swaying carriage, he bent and kissed her.

"Enjoy yourself," he said, rather wistfully.

"Rather. Of course I shall," she promised gaily. The train slowed down to the platform.

IX

Clement had not much shopping to do, and the hour before lunch was his own, to devote to his own peculiar indulgences—the indulgence after which he thirsted in Barnsdyke, as another man might thirst after music, or the sea, or drink, or the sight of foreign places. He went into a bookshop. It was the largest bookshop in Melchester, and kept by people who knew their business. They did not pursue their customers around the shop to ask them what they wanted. They did not distract them by hovering at their elbow, nor when asked for a book which they had not got, did they proffer an altogether different book as a substitute. There was always one or two people in the shop, gently turning over pages, or taking down books and replacing them on the shelves.

Clement stood just inside the doorway filling his eyes with the mere sight of books—large books, biographies,

memoirs, or expensive editions, small books, cheap editions of standard authors, thin volumes of poetry, new seven-and-sixpenny novels, plump and shining in their gay jackets, cheap novels, and reissues crowded together like a lot of friendly mongrels—the mere sight of them so satisfied his heart that for the moment it was enough. The public library at Barnsdyke was small, the books in poor condition and much in demand. An enterprising tobacconist kept a small circulating library, but his stock consisted chiefly of detective novels. There was no money to spare at the vicarage to buy books. Even Joyce did not know how badly Clement wanted them, how he read every scrap of review in the *Church Times* and in the daily paper, and tantalized himself by reading them, how even the advertisements of books had a special charm for him, so that they seemed more alive than anything else on the page.

He was moving first towards the poetry, but a shelf of children's books caught his eye, attractive in their gay-coloured wrappers and bindings. He picked up a large illustrated "Treasure Island", and at once he was lost to the world. The surf-ridden seas rolled over the floor of the shop, the fever-haunted swamps of the island stretched before his feet. He had opened the book at the place where Long John Silver came into the stockade with the flag of truce, and though he had first read it when he was ten years old, and had read it a dozen times since, he read on now, spellbound with excitement. He had that faculty of losing himself absolutely and completely in a book, so that he not only lost consciousness of his whereabouts, but even of the printed page. He did

not know that he was reading words, though their sound charmed him. He was aware of nothing at all but of the sandy space within the palisade, and of the Captain and Long John facing one another across the tiny spring.

No one noticed the quaint figure, the tall parson stooping his head over the boys' book, and reading with greedy absorption. Some one brushed against him in passing, and the movement recalled him to the fact that he was wasting his precious hour on a book which he had at home. Before he put it back on the shelf, he stood for a minute holding it in his hands, and in that minute his mind conceived. The idea came to him to make a book, to make men and women, to breathe life into them, to hear them speak, to see them move. The idea came to him as suddenly as Gabriel came to Mary in the garden. It was like the beginning of the earth, without form, and void. Only he felt that life had stirred in him, and the life was the beginning of a book, his book, that he should one day write, that he should one day see as a concrete thing of cardboard and print and paper, like the book between his hands.

The moment of illumination passed before he had replaced "Treasure Island" between "Fairy Tales for a Five-Year-Old" and "The Boys' Bumper Book." The thing went out in his mind as though some one had switched off a light. He found with surprise that his hands were shaking, and he was trembling with excitement. He looked around the shop. He saw a long-haired weedy young man hovering over the cheap editions, and a girl behind a counter wrapping up a book for a woman

in a fur coat. He walked across to the shelf of poetry in the corner.

He turned over a book of poems by a modern poet whose name was unknown to him. He had never been able to keep in touch with the modern poetry. In his time at Oxford, just before the war, Rupert Brooke had been the modern poet, and he supposed that Rupert Brooke was now the last generation. This new stuff that he had got hold of fascinated him by its strangeness of shape and metre. He read for a little while, then put it back, and took down the collected Masefield.

It was a fat book. He liked the feeling of a fat book, with its suggestion of plenty. He turned the pages idly, looking for old favourites. His eye was caught by a short poem called "Truth", alone upon a page. He had not seen it before. He read the first verse:

"Man with his burning soul
Has but an hour of breath
To build a ship of truth
On which his soul may sail, . . .
Sail on the seas of death, . . .
For death takes toll
Of beauty, courage, youth,
Of all but truth."

He read the verse again slowly and almost against his will, as though it compelled him. "Yes," he said in his own mind. The image evoked by the lines recalled to him the first prayer out of the Christening Service, "That he . . . may be received into the ark of Christ's Church, and . . . so pass through the waves of this troublesome

world . . ." At first, he thought that the two images were the same, then he became aware that they were not. "To build a ship—to be received into an ark" . . . His mind saw the distinction and turned away from it. He read the next verse:

"Life's city ways are dark,
Men mutter by: the wells
Of the great waters moan, . . .
Oh death! Oh sea! Oh tide!
The waters moan like bells, . . .
No light, no mark,
The soul goes out alone
On seas unknown."

Standing there in the bookship, he was touched again by his child's terror of eternity. He saw the life of man as a small, lighted island in those dark and windy seas. A fragment of an ode of Horace, learnt at school, drifted across his mind: *"Illi robur et aes triplex, Circa pectus erat qui fragilem truci Commisit pelago ratem. . . ."* There was no oak and three-fold brass around his own heart. He was afraid. In the ark of Christ's Church was his only security, and if he were to leave it . . . Why had he thought of leaving it? He read the last verse:

"Stripped of all purple robes,
Stripped of all golden lies,
I will not be afraid, . . .
Truth will preserve through death,
Perhaps the stars will rise,
The stars like globes; . . .
The ship my striving made
May see night fade."

He looked at the price of the book. It was eight-and-sixpence; and he was tempted as he had not been tempted for a long time. He was so tempted that the idea came into his mind, even while he laughed at it, that he might put the book into his pocket and walk off with it. He was tempted to take out pencil and paper and copy the poem, which seemed to him hardly less mean. He walked across to the counter, carrying the book in his hand.

"Have you a cheaper edition, or a smaller volume of Masefield with this poem in it?"

The salesman took the book and looked at the page.

"It is bound up with 'Philip the King', sir. We have 'Philip the King' in the separate edition—6*s*."

Six shillings was more than he had spent on himself at once for some time, except for the necessities of clothing. Even his tobacco he limited rigidly to four pipes a day, lest he should smoke the food and clothes of Joyce, Mary, and Michael. He knew that he ought not to do it, but he could not resist it. He had a bad memory—he would not remember the poem. He must have it. He said:

"Have you a copy of that?" and took a ten-shilling note out of his pocketbook, feeling as though he were burgling it. When the book was wrapped up and he had got his change, he went out of the shop. There was still half an hour before he was due to meet Joyce, but he could not stay on the scene of his crime. He walked away through the streets, a long, lean black figure, stooping a little, regardless of the passers-by.

X

Clement and Joyce met in the lounge at the Victoria. It was so long since either of them had been into a restaurant that they both felt a little shy. Clement at Oxford had always envied the assurance with which men of his own age addressed waiters and hall porters. He had struggled for the same assurance, but had always found himself giving confused and apologetic orders, often choosing something that he did not really want, from a vague feeling that by doing so he was making it clear to the waiter that he did not mean to order him about. During the war his shyness had worn off a good deal, but four years in Barnsdyke had made him feel rustic and an intruder, even in such places as the Victoria. In Joyce's shyness was more pleasurable excitement. It was nice to be taken out to lunch again! Both she and Clement looked round the lounge, occupied chiefly by business men, colliery proprietors, and agents of big companies entertaining prospective customers, and both felt that they were making an exciting excursion into the gay world.

Clement took Joyce's umbrella and his own coat and went up to the counter. A man was there before him, handing over coat and hat and talking to the cloakroom attendant. Clement saw broad shoulders, a reddish neck, iron-grey hair, growing thin at the top. The man turned and saw that he was keeping him waiting.

"Sorry, sir, sorry"—he looked again, and held out his hand.

"Why, is it you, Clement? I haven't seen you for years.

How are you? I don't think I've seen you since your father's funeral—and that must be—let's see—nine—ten years ago."

"Nine, sir, this autumn."

"Oh, yes, I remember; you were in khaki then, though—back on leave."

"Yes, it was two months before the Armistice."

"It seems a long time ago, doesn't it? You've changed—but it may be the parson's clothes. You're lunching here, I suppose. Are you alone?"

"No, my wife is with me."

"Married, are you? Any children?"

"Yes, a girl and a boy."

"You've your hands full! Well, you'll both come and have lunch with me, won't you? It was a bit of luck that I happened to come across you."

Clement took him across to Joyce.

"You don't know Mr. Wheatley, Joyce. He was a very old friend of my father's."

"I used to live in his parish," Mr. Wheatley explained, shaking hands. "I knew your husband very well as a boy, but I've never run across him since the war. I was so glad to see him again. You'll join me at lunch, won't you? I am expecting my children, but they are sure to be late."

Clement wondered if Joyce were disappointed at the loss of their tête-à-tête lunch. She did not show it, of course. She was looking very pretty, smiling, her cheeks pinker than usual from the day's excitement.

"Shall we go on?" Mr. Wheatley said. "We won't wait for the children. They'll join us."

"Will they mind coming in alone?" Joyce asked doubtfully. She was evidently visualizing Mary and Michael, a little older, coming timorously into the lounge.

"Not they," their father said easily. "Here they are, though," he added.

The swing door at the entrance to the lounge began to revolve with unusual speed. Mr. Wheatley's children flowed into the lounge like a tide. Joyce's first impression was that there were half a dozen of them, all arguing. It was not until the party were finally sitting at the table that they resolved themselves into three, Philip, apparently just down from Oxford, Daisy, apparently just grown up, and a round-faced child of fourteen, whom the others addressed impartially as "Pug" or "Puggie", or, when talking of her, as the Pest.

"Do you like oysters?" Philip asked Joyce as soon as they sat down.

"No, I don't, not very much."

"That's good," Philip said with satisfaction. "I'll eat yours for you. Does Mr. Dyson like them? Daisy will eat his if he doesn't. I hope he does though, it will serve her right. I don't think it's nice to be so greedy about oysters, do you—for a woman, I mean?"

Joyce looked across at Daisy, who was carefully reddening her lips, and gazing earnestly into the small mirror of her handbag. Daisy seemed to her an alarming young person, so self-possessed, so poised, so altogether complete, but at Philip's words she lowered the handbag, made a face at him, smiled at Joyce in a friendly fashion, and resumed her operations.

"Don't take any notice of Philip," she said in a

clear voice. "We never do. He waxes fat and kicks."

"I lost two pounds last week," cried the outraged Philip.

"That was because you were weighed without your overcoat."

"It was not."

"Then it was that machine at the club that Daddy always says is out of order."

"It was not, let me tell you. It was a perfectly good machine at the hairdresser's." Philip abandoned the argument, and turned to Joyce for sympathy.

"It isn't bad, you know, is it, Mrs. Dyson, to lose two pounds in a fortnight? You wouldn't call me fat, would you?"

"No, I shouldn't," Joyce said, laughing.

"There you are, you see," Philip nodded at Daisy across the table. "You heard that, didn't you? An impartial opinion. We're going to buy a car this afternoon," he added, transferring Joyce's oysters to his own plate. "For my personal use," he added in decided tones, and with a meaning glance across the table.

"When you get a job," Daisy retorted swiftly, "you won't want a car in the daytime?"

"My good girl, I've got to get to the job, haven't I? And home again, the jaded business man. Besides, you never know. A lot of jobs are nothing but running about in a car all day long, from morning to night." He added generously, "I'll tell you what. You can have it to go to church on Sunday mornings."

Daisy smiled at what was obviously a joke. It was quite plain that there was something funny to her, as to Philip,

in the idea of going to church on Sunday morning. Joyce saw it, and was oppressed by the sense of the great gulf between her life and theirs, an unhappy sense of a division of thought, too great for her to cross, and a sort of envy of their freedom from her own obligations.

"What sort of a car are you going to buy?" she asked Philip.

"I don't know yet—a Morris, I think. Will you come and try it with me?"

"I can't. I think we're going to the pictures."

The Pest, hitherto absorbed in her lunch, woke to sudden life.

"What are you going to see?" she asked in a solemn voice, fixing her large blue eyes on Joyce.

"I don't know," Joyce confessed. "What are we, Clem?"

Clement had been talking to Wheatley, but he had been listening to the others. She had seen him smiling at them. She felt that she wanted his support among these young people to whom her serious things were funny.

"I thought we'd go to the Central," he said. "I don't know what's on."

"Oh, don't go there!" the Pest spoke earnestly, leaning forward across the table. "'The Storm Cloud' is on there. That's a flop! They are all ham actors!"

"She means it's an unsatisfactory performance," Philip explained kindly. "She gets all this vulgar language out of the film papers. She's always hoping some one will take her for an American—why, I can't think. She's got a very vulgar nature. It's hard on Daisy and me—lets us down, doesn't it, Daisy?"

The Pest disregarded him.

"Who is your favourite star, Mrs. Dyson?" she said with intense interest.

"I hardly ever go to the pictures," Joyce confessed. She felt that she was sinking rapidly in the Pest's opinion, and added with vague recollections, "I like Charlie Chaplin."

"Do you?" the Pest said coldly. It was quite obviously the wrong answer. She turned her unwavering stare on Clement.

"Who is yours, Mr. Dyson?"

"I'm afraid I haven't one," he owned, but partially redeemed his character by adding, "Who is yours?"

"Charles Farrell," she said in tones of reverence. "You really ought to see him. He's a wonderful actor."

"Actor!" Philip exclaimed. "Actor! Him! The great Charles! Not on your life! He couldn't register emotion if he saw a mad bull coming for him. Now, Dolores Costello . . ."

His sisters informed him in chorus that Dolores Costello was like something off the back of a chocolate box, "And not good chocolates either," the Pest added, with withering scorn.

Clement watched and listened to them with amusement. He glanced from them to Joyce. She was listening to them, her smile a little puzzled. Their careless youth made her feel staid and matronly. She looked faded and shabby by comparison with the pretty Daisy in her plain, expensive clothes. Clement did not see this, but he felt it dimly, and a warm impulse of protecting pity stirred in

him. He felt that Joyce was real, part of the everyday working world, the world that laboured and sorrowed, and in which these gay children seemed to have no part. He tried to imagine them serious. He wondered what they thought about God and the universe, and came to the conclusion that they didn't think much about either. He said to Philip:

"You've come down from Oxford, haven't you? What are you doing now?"

"Looking for a job," Philip explained.

His father said that he was taking damn good care he didn't find one.

Clement heard Daisy say in tones of lively interest: "Which is the oldest—Mary or Michael?" He saw Joyce taking out of her bag a snapshot which she had taken in the garden, and of which she was so proud, saw her colour and smile at Daisy's warm, "Oh, what darlings! Oh, they are sweet! Do let me come over and see them." He didn't suppose Daisy would come. She would never think again of the parson and his wife that Daddy used to know, but there was a charm in her ready friendliness.

"You know, somehow, I didn't expect you to take orders, after all," Mr. Wheatley said. "I know it was always the idea, of course, but then the war came, and so many young fellows came back from it with different ideas and ambitions—and you did so well that I thought you might stay on in the army."

"I couldn't stand the life in peace time, sir—and I'd always meant to take orders."

"You had a curacy in Liverpool, didn't you?"

"Yes, for four years."

"Like it?"

"Yes, very much. We were frightfully busy, of course. I had very little time to do any reading."

"You were always a great reader. I remember when you were a small boy seeing you quiet in a corner of a room for hours with a book. You like being at Barnsdyke, do you?"

"Yes. The vicarage is too big for us, but I like the place and the people. There's nothing like your own part of the world."

Wheatley agreed heartily. He added, after a minute's reflection, "I shouldn't think it's an easy job, being a parson nowadays."

"Do you think it ever was, sir?"

"Easier than it is now, certainly. When I was a boy, we didn't hear so much about the church. It was there, and we went to it, or didn't; but we weren't always hearing what was wrong with it. Everything is so unsettled nowadays. We're all a bit lost, and we're inclined to blame the sky pilots for not showing us the way out. We forget that they don't know any more about it than we do. I never go to church myself, now, so I can't say much about it, and those two"—he indicated Daisy and Philip—"never go; Pamela represents the family, and I tell her she goes because the others don't—she likes being different—isn't that it, Pug?"

The round-faced Pamela, who had been listening, said solemnly:

"I go because I'm a Conservative. I think the Church and State ought to support one another. Philip's a Liberal,

so he stays away from dissenting chapels, and Daisy doesn't mind what she is, as long as she can have breakfast in bed. I don't want to be different from them when their ideas are sensible, but when they aren't, of course I have to be."

"There you are, you see," Mr. Wheatley said. "When I was young, they would all have been packed off to church every Sunday as a matter of course—now, only the one who wants to goes. It's the same with music. It's the reason why all these concerts and choral societies don't pay. In the old days, everybody went because it was the thing. Now only the ones who like music go, and there aren't enough of them in this country."

"If you're going to see the quickie first," Pamela addressed Joyce in her serious voice, "you ought to be there at five minutes past two. The Pathé Gazette comes in the middle. I think you ought to start now. I shouldn't wait for coffee, if I were you."

XI

When Clement and Joyce came out of the cinema, it was already getting dark, and the street lamps and shop windows were alight. It was the city's hour of beauty; the ugliness of the grey streets and dingy buildings was transformed by the magic and mystery of dusk, as by a daily miracle. The dark shapes of the buildings had dignity and strangeness. In the blue dusk, the lighted trams swung by like great galleons ploughing through secret seas.

"I must go down to St. Paul's now," Clement said.

He stopped under a street lamp. "Look here, Joyce. Wheatley paid for our lunch, and we only paid afternoon prices for the film. Here's the money I meant to spend. You take it and spend it—buy something for yourself—a hat or something—not anything useful or for the house or the children—something you really want."

"Oh, Clem, oughtn't we to save it?"

He felt "Philip the King" heavy in his pocket.

"No," he said. He added the instinctive protest of the poor: "We can't always be saving. I must fly—I shall be late. You'll get the 6.10, I suppose? I hope you won't be very tired. Don't sit up for me. I've got my key. Good-bye."

She watched him striding away towards the tram stop, and wished that he could have come home with her. She had not liked to tell him, but since she had been so much shut up in one place, she had grown timid, and she rather dreaded the solitary journey.

She looked at the money in her hand—a ten-shilling note and two half-crowns—enough to buy a pair of boots for Mary—or to have the cretonne chair covers cleaned—or to put new curtains in the bathroom. As she looked at it, she was possessed by an unusual spirit of rebellion. She thought of Daisy Wheatley and her clothes, of Daisy, who didn't mind what she was so long as she could have breakfast in bed in the morning. She thought of the lovely dresses and gay scenes in the film they had just been watching. She thought of all the people who had no anxieties, of all the people who had so many of the things that she had none of. Then she was ashamed of herself. She thought of Clement and Mary and Michael. She

looked with different eyes at the money in her hand. If he had more, poor old boy, he would give it to her. She knew how he minded when she or the children went without things, and how little he minded for himself. It was sweet of him to think of it. The rebellion was still so far awake in her, that she resolved she would not buy boots for Mary, nor bathroom curtains. She would have tea first, a really interesting tea, and she would spend the rest on something useless, something she oughtn't to have.

She went into a Fuller's shop and sat down at one of the little tables. She ordered a pot of China tea and a muffin. She ate and drank slowly and luxuriously, lingering over her choice of cakes. It was so lovely to have a meal that you hadn't ordered, and to have little cakes complete in themselves—not slices of the cake which Doris baked every Saturday, and which had to last till the next Saturday.

When she had finished, she bought a box of chocolate animals for Mary and Michael.

It was quite dark in the street when she went out. She lingered for a long time at the window of a flower shop, looking in at the early spring flowers—snowdrops, violets, tulips, bright blots of colour on slender stalks of hothouse green, irises, azaleas in pots. She looked for some time, walked slowly on, and bought a quarter of a pound of Clement's favourite tobacco at the next tobacconist's she came to. She had ten shillings left, and she could not make up her mind what to do with it. Everything that she wanted for herself seemed wickedly extravagant or else silly, not likely to be any good to her in Barnsdyke. She wanted a choker necklace of imitation pearls, a vanity

case, with powder and lipstick in attractive holders, or a shoulder-spray of velvet orchids.

Suddenly she was frightened because she could not spend the money as she would have done four years ago. Her conscience, or whatever it was, simply would not let her. For the first time she was really frightened of poverty, not because of its hardships and deprivations, but because she saw it as a thing holding her down, cramping her mind and will. She stood still for a minute on the pavement, realizing this. She pulled herself together with a deliberate effort, went into a shop and bought a string of cheap pearls. She bought a bunch of pink tulips and a box of chocolates. It was almost time for her train, and she had to hurry to the station. She found a carriage and climbed in, breathing a sigh of relief as she deposited her spoil on the seat. It had been a lovely day, and she had enjoyed herself, but she was glad to be going home. She had got out of the way of doing things and going to places. She only wanted to be in the house with Clement and Mary and Michael, where she was so much needed, and where she was not disturbed by wishes and comparisons. She began to imagine Mary's face when she saw the chocolate animals, and so imagining dozed, leaning back against the corner of the railway carriage.

XII

In the infants' classroom of the school, Clement read his paper to the St. Paul's branch of the English Church Union. The subject was "The Relationship between Church and State." The paper had been written a few

months ago, for the meeting had originally been fixed for November, but for some reason had been postponed till after Christmas. At the time, Clement had put a good deal of work into the paper, and had been much interested, especially in the historical side of it. Now, as he read it, it seemed to him rather unreal. It was too cut and dried, too much like a history lesson. If he were to write it now, he thought he would write it differently, though he could not see at once what the difference would be.

In the chair at his side, the Reverend John Caldicott, Vicar of St. Paul's, sat without moving, his big hands clasped in the lap of his cassock, his stern eyes brooding on the handful of the faithful who had turned out on a cold night to attend the meeting. He looked at them as though they ought to have been more, and as though he were reproaching them for not being more. His stern gaze seemed to defy them to take any pride in themselves for being there at all. The aspect of his parishioners most often before the mind of the Reverend John Caldicott was that they were unprofitable servants.

Clement, on the other hand, was surprised that they were there at all. He looked up at them as he finished the paper, seeing them clearly with that new vision of people and things which had lately come to him. He guessed that those three girls in their fur-collared coats and little neat hats had been typing all day in some office, had spent the whole day being willing, and civil, and useful, and good-tempered, had rushed home to swallow a hasty tea, and had come out again to sit in this cold schoolroom smelling of gas and infants to hear his paper. He guessed that the stout man sitting in the corner was one of those pillars

of the church, a sidesman, perhaps, or a churchwarden, who did a hundred small jobs that had to be done by somebody. He guessed that he always made a speech at parish teas and probably sang a comic song at parochial concerts. He guessed that the tired-looking woman in the front row was one of those who spend what time they have to spare from looking after their families in helping with bazaars and sewing meetings. These people were the very stuff of which a West-Riding parish was made, hard-working, faithful, cheerful, touchy and independent—the salt of the earth, Clement thought. He wondered why they had come out to-night, whether they thought it their duty, whether they were vitally concerned in the relationship between Church and State, or whether they were moved unconsciously by the need to find God in their daily lives. He felt ashamed, as though they had come for bread, and he had given them a stone.

When he had read to the end of his paper, he leaned forward across the table and spoke to them:

"I do thank you all for coming out here to listen to me to-night. There are so very many difficulties now for churchmen and women—so many things that are hard to reconcile and understand, so many disputes, so many doubts—I feel as every priest must feel, that I can do so little to help you—that I cannot even be sure that it is worth your while to hear what I have to say. You are as near to God as I am, but I pray God bless you and keep you."

The words were unpremeditated, he had not meant to say them. He was aware that the vicar had moved and glanced at him. He sat back, feeling embarrassed

and tired. At his side Caldicott said in his deep, slow voice:

"I am sure we are all very grateful to Mr. Dyson for coming all the way from Barnsdyke to read us such an interesting paper. Mr. Hemingway——"

The stout man in the corner rose and proposed a vote of thanks, speaking with the astonishing ease and fluency of the average parish speaker. The vote was seconded by a grey-haired man who had once met Clement's father at the vicarage, and consequently regarded himself as a friend of the family.

A small, anxious-looking man rose and made a speech for no obvious reason, beginning modestly, "I know I am but a flea to the other speakers," and winding up with an account of the last vicar's kindness to his mother in her last illness. So far as Clement could gather, it was gratitude for this kindness which had brought him here to-night to support the English Church Union. Clement had a vision of that network of friendships and friendly relationships which covers the West Riding of Yorkshire, and of which the church and the parish life are so often the centre. There was something warming in the thought of it, as though that crowded bit of England were one large family whose members were always running up against one another in unexpected places. He realized that Caldicott was going to read the final prayers and scrambled hastily to his feet.

"The Blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, be among you and remain with you always."

The words seemed to Clement to bring an almost start-

ling sense of an invisible Presence into the dingy, gas-lit classroom. They were words familiar to him from his early childhood. He had always thought of them as a sort of "Good-bye" or "Good night" to the congregation. To sit up late for evening church had been a great treat to him as a small boy—chiefly because he was allowed to sit up for supper after it. He remembered coming out of church one Sunday evening in the state of exaltation induced by the consciousness of virtue—he had not fidgeted—and by the prospect of cold chicken for supper. He remembered the tune of the last hymn, "Saviour, again to Thy dear Name we raise", and the smell of flowering lilacs in the churchyard.

Caldicott touched him on the arm.

"Now come along into the clergy house and have some supper."

XIII

That the Church of St. Paul's was a rallying point for the Anglo-Catholic clergy of the diocese was due to the personality of its vicar. John Caldicott was a man of dominant nature, and of strong and unshaken convictions, so that weaker men clung to him for moral support. His energy was inexhaustible. He worked ceaselessly in his big town parish and trained his curates to work as he did. He was perpetually organizing missions or preparing for conferences. He sat on committees for missionary and rescue work, and attended all the meetings, for whatever he undertook he did thoroughly. He was confessor to the Anglo-Catholic clergy for miles

round. He conducted retreats in religious houses and addressed Anglo-Catholic conferences. He was a good speaker and preacher, vigorous and direct. He had a habit of building up a sermon around one monosyllable, and stressing that monosyllable in his deep voice—"Love", "Joy", "Sin", "Work"—till it was fairly certain that his hearers would carry at least one word away with them. He expected no more, for he had few illusions. He did not know it, but his religion was the religion of the Old Testament—of a sinful people, and of a jealous God.

Clement followed him upstairs into the dining room of the clergy house. There were two curates, but one was away for a week. The other, a gentle young man called Legard, was sitting on the club fender reading *Punch*. He put it down and rose to greet Clement. He had a friendly, but rather shy manner. He smiled at Clement as he shook hands, but his eyes went at once to his vicar's face.

"Was it a good meeting, sir?"

"No. The usual. By the way, old Mrs. Akeroyd has had another stroke—will you look in to-morrow? Sit here, where it's warm, Dyson. Ring the bell for the potatoes, will you, Legard?"

Clement sat down in the chair assigned to him. The room was warm and comfortably furnished, a good carpet on the floor, solid chairs and table, a small bookshelf, a couple of engravings of Oxford on the walls. He knew it well, for in his early days at Barnsdyke he had often come to see Caldicott for counsel and encouragement. He had had a young man's admiration for the senior officer fighting in the same cause, and the strong person-

ality had attracted him. It was only lately that he had not been so often.

"I think it was a mistake to say what you said at the end," Caldicott remarked. "Will you have some veal-and-ham pie? Most people are only too ready to think that it is not worth their while to come and hear what a priest has to say to them—the mustard is in front of you, Legard—why did you say it?"

"Because I felt it. I've often thought lately that I don't know why people come to hear us preach or lecture to them. If they come to church for a service—a sacrament —that's another matter."

"They need to be taught," Caldicott answered, "and there is only one way of teaching—constant repetition. You can only get a thing into their minds by saying it over and over again."

"Yes, sir. But it's so difficult to know what to teach them."

He saw, or thought he saw, a flicker of surprise in the deep-set grey eyes.

"Our business is to teach them the Catholic faith." He broke off. "You'll drink beer, won't you? Legard, will you open a bottle?" He turned again to Clement.

"How are you getting on in Barnsdyke?"

"Not too well."

"You mustn't expect much, you know. They're an unresponsive people; any increase in the number of communicants?"

"Yes, a few, I think. I don't know—it varies." He broke out suddenly, laying down his knife and fork.

"What's wrong with the Church, sir!"

It was like the remarks at the end of his paper—he had not meant to say it. Legard was pouring out his beer, and the bottle clinked against the glass. The mild young man was painfully surprised. Caldicott answered sternly:

"I suppose what always has been wrong with it—the people who belong to it, the indifference or the positive sin of human nature, in fact, the Devil." He added grimly, "This is a secular age—a pleasure-loving and sensation-seeking generation. There is not enough pleasure or sensation to be got by coming to church—so they do not come. They prefer to go to a football match or to the pictures."

"I don't think I blame them—not our people up here, anyway, seeing the drabness and monotony of their daily lives."

There was a silence. Legard, flushed and uncomfortable, kept glancing at his vicar. Clement felt as though he were wound up so that he could not stop. He went on desperately:

"What I mean is—why has the Church got so far away from the ordinary man—so that it doesn't seem to have anything to do with him, and he can leave it out of his life as a matter of course? How is it that that has happened? Christ understood him. Christ spent His whole life with ordinary people, people who worked for their living, and did ordinary things—then why has the Church got so far away from them?"

Glancing across the table, he saw suddenly in Legard's pale-blue eyes a timid, hesitating agreement. Legard

avoided his glance nervously, and bent his head over his plate.

"Shouldn't you rather say, 'Why has the ordinary man got so far away from the Church?'" Caldicott suggested. He was watching Clement narrowly.

Clement wished he could stop saying these things which he now realized had been on his mind for weeks, but he could not.

"There was the war—every one thought that would make such a tremendous difference—but it hasn't. I think it's made it worse. A man said to me the other day that he never went to church now because when he was in the army he got into trouble for forgetting to salute a chaplain. He said that the chaplains were nothing but blooming officers. Of course, that put them as far away from the men as if they were on the other side of a river. Why didn't the Church see that? Why didn't it stop all that nonsense of officers and uniform and saluting? And the same man said to me 'If God is good, why was there a war at all?' He'd had three years of it and been wounded twice, and he'd been out of work pretty nearly ever since. He said, 'Don't talk to me about coming to church. See what your God's done to me.'" Clement paused, and looked from Caldicott's grim face to the puzzled, uneasy Legard. He said with a queer note of desperation in his voice:

"You know I—I didn't know what to say to him."

When the words were out, he felt relieved, as though he had got an unhappy secret off his mind. Legard murmured:

"Yes. I know, I know—it is hard." His eyelids fluttered nervously.

"He's bothered too," Clement thought, "or he would be, only he lets Caldicott settle everything for him." He looked at Caldicott, and a kind of hostility awoke in him. "Caldicott's hard. He's like a prophet. He's so wrapped up in the faith that he hasn't got any feelings for people outside it. It ought not to work that way—it's not the way Christ meant it to work, but it does work that way with some of the best people, some of the ones that believe most, that care most. Why? What is it? Is it the Church? Caldicott says it's the people that belong to it. But why should the ones that belong to it most, are the most inside it, be farther off from ordinary people? It can't be their fault. They are trying harder than any one. Something's wrong. . . ."

All the time that his thoughts went round and round in his head, he was aware of the ticking of the clock, and the flicker of the fire in the grate; of Caldicott folding his napkin with deliberate fingers, and of Legard looking uneasy, as though something might be said at any minute which he would not like to hear.

Caldicott pushed back his chair and rose.

"Isn't it your night at the club, Legard?"

"By Jove, yes! I shall be late." Legard jumped up willingly.

"Well, good-bye, Dyson." He struggled to be hearty. "I shall be running over to see you one of these days, on my day off—for a little country air, you know," he added with a nervous giggle.

"Rather—any time you can get off," Clement said cordially.

Legard was a really kind-hearted young man, and was prompted by a strong desire to say something kind to Clement, whom he suspected of being in disgrace, and also unhappy. At the same time, he was restrained by the natural awe in which he held his vicar. He only achieved a nervous "Well, it's been nice to see you again. I say, I must fly."

He hurried out of the room, assuming unconsciously the brisk and jolly air which he thought suitable for the Boys' Club. He did not really like boys, but he recognized that he ought to. He tried to concentrate on their immortal souls, and to ignore their uncouth manners and noisy voices. They were always more rowdy with him than with Caldicott or Lamb.

Caldicott moved across to the fireplace.

"You've time for a pipe—you needn't start for the train for another quarter of an hour. Have some of Legard's tobacco."

He held out the tobacco jar, and waved Clement into one of the big chairs. The housekeeper came in to clear the table. The two men were silent while she was in the room. Caldicott, who did not smoke, made up the fire with his usual deliberate neatness. When the door had shut behind the housekeeper for the last time, he said:

"When did you last have a holiday?"

Clement looked up, startled.

"In August last year."

"You were taking a parish then, though?"

"Yes, I swopped with a man from Liverpool."

Caldicott considered him. The face behind the blue cloud of tobacco smoke looked to him too thin and lined for the face of a man of thirty-five. He reflected briefly on the circumstances which he knew so well—hard work, perpetual discouragement, lack of any very congenial company, the endless difficulty of making two ends meet. He said abruptly:

"Why not go away, by yourself—for the inside of a fortnight? Go to Bournemouth, or somewhere like that. I'll see to the Sunday for you. Legard or Lamb will run over for the Saturday night."

"Thanks very much," Clement answered, surprised. "I couldn't get away just now—but it's very good of you."

"If it's not convenient to afford it just now," Caldicott said, in the same abrupt tones, "we can easily arrange that—if you'll let me lend you what you want. You can pay me at Easter, or any time when it suits you. It wouldn't cost much. I know one or two quite cheap places where they make you very comfortable."

Clement flushed, more from shame at his late thoughts of Caldicott than at any feeling of embarrassment at his offer. He did not say that he could not borrow the money because he saw no earthly chance of repaying it, and the Easter offering had already been apportioned in his mind to half a dozen repairs in the vicarage which must be done before worse happened. He said gratefully:

"It's very good of you, sir, and I am very grateful—but I really don't need a holiday. I'm perfectly fit. I think my wife needs one more than I do."

Caldicott said nothing. He disapproved strongly of

married clergy. He thought their lives were made impossible by the added burden of wife and family. His own human instincts had been so sternly repressed that they had almost disappeared, and he did not allow for their workings in other people.

"It was very kind of you to think of it," Clement repeated. "I ought to go now, I suppose."

"Yes, if you want to make sure of the train." Both men rose.

"Well, think it over," Caldicott advised, opening the door. "If you decide to go, send me a line, and I can easily arrange it for you. Lamb will be back on Saturday."

Clement paused in the doorway.

"I don't think it would be any better to run away from it—I want to think things out here where they first began to unsettle me."

"There are times when it is almost necessary to run away," Caldicott remarked—*" 'reculer pour mieux sauter.'* Thank you for coming. Good night."

XIV

Clement arrived on the platform as the guard was blowing the whistle. He ran across and jumped into the nearest carriage—a first-class smoker. The train began to move as he opened the door. He sat down in the corner of the carriage, filled with the triumph of successful achievement. The carriage was not empty. There was a girl in the far corner, wrapped in a big coat of soft grey fur. She was fitting a cigarette into an amber holder, and she took out a small enamel lighter and lit it. The flame

lit up her face more clearly than the dim lamp in the ceiling. Clement thought that he knew her.

"I beg your pardon"—he bowed, and then hesitated —did he know her after all? Apparently, for she bent her head and smiled in answer to his bow.

"We met the other day, Mr. Dyson, for a second in the street—I was with Rodney Perfect—do you remember? My name is Veronica Marston, but I am living with Rodney at the Grange."

She said it neither brazenly nor with any embarrassment, but as though she said "I am staying at the King's Arms."

His first thought was, "What a beautiful voice!" His second was a startled realization of who she was and of her position. This was a woman divorced by her husband and living with another man, therefore, in the eyes of the Church, living in sin—the equivalent in another state of life of what the village called "A girl that had got into mischief with a boy", or "gone wrong." He had never felt anything but pity for those girls, pity and a sort of impatience at the hushed tones in which people spoke of them, at the way in which the Diocesan Rescue workers regarded them as transformed by their misfortune into another order of being. Of this girl, so quiet and so much at her ease, he did not know what to think.

"I am glad I met you," Veronica said. "Don't you want to smoke?"

"Do you mind a pipe?"

"Not a bit. I'm used to it"—Rodney's pipe, he wondered, or her husband's? He filled his and lit it.

"I'm glad I have met you because Rodney is coming

to see you to ask you to marry us in your church. You know that my husband divorced me, and that the decree was made absolute last week? I don't mind about being married in church, but Rodney has set his heart on it. What I wanted to ask you was, will it do you any harm?"

She was looking at him very steadily, but the down-turned brim of her felt hat made a little shadow across her eyes. He hesitated, taken aback by the suddenness of the problem presented to him. She saw that he was startled.

"It's not allowed?" she said. "I thought it wasn't."

"It's not supposed to be," he muttered. "The Church is against it—but it has been done."

"I suppose it's more difficult in the case of the guilty person? I mean, if I had divorced Claud, and not Claud me, it would be easier?"

"Yes."

"I could have done," she said, and there was a silence. After a minute she broke it:

"I can see that you mustn't go against your Church —but it seems queer, doesn't it? If you married us, we should be living together respectably, and our children, if we had any, would be all right. If you didn't, we should still be living together just the same, only not respectably, and our children would be illegitimate. Do you think that would be much better?"

"No," he said. "I don't." His brows were knitted in a frown, his teeth dug into the stem of his pipe. He took the pipe out of his mouth.

"You see, the Church teaches that marriage is a sacrament."

"What exactly does it mean by that?"

"It means that—that it's a holy covenant between a man and woman made in the sight of God, and lasting till death."

"I see. Then it means that a woman should go on living with a man she doesn't love. That's not holy. It's more like hell."

"She need not live with him—she mustn't live with any one else."

"I see," she said again. Once more there was a silence between them. Veronica jerked the end of her cigarette out of the holder, and fitted in another one. The train rattled and roared on its way. Clement lifted a corner of the blind and looked out of the window at the countryside, dotted all over with rows and clusters of lamps like one great, straggling town.

"Don't you think," Veronica said steadily, "that the Church is rather hard on ordinary people?"

He turned round to her with a quick movement.

"Don't!" he said abruptly.

She saw something startled and defenceless in his face. It struck her how young he looked, in spite of the lines. She had the feeling of talking to somebody very inexperienced and ignorant, somebody she must be careful not to startle too much. She said gently:

"Why 'don't'?"

He said, "I can't tell—I don't know. I used to be certain about everything, but now I'm not sure about any-

thing at all, and it's awful—it's like being lost—this not being certain."

He looked at her with his very bright, very young eyes, as though he expected her to help him. She said, still gently:

"But can one be certain of everything—I mean, after one is once grown up? Wouldn't that be only—pretending—like the ostrich hiding his head in the sand?"

"Yes," he said eagerly. "I know. I'll show you."

He jumped up and began to look for something in the pocket of his overcoat, which was in the rack. She looked at his long, amazingly lean back in the black clerical coat, and at the short hair ruffled by leaning against the carriage. She was very sorry for him. She thought that he was beginning to find out that the world was not like his preconceived idea of it. She remembered making the same discovery herself in the first year of her marriage with Claud. She did not believe that any one could be what she called in her own mind "a grown-up person" until he or she had made the discovery, but she knew how it hurt.

"Here it is," he said. He had dragged a parcel from the pocket. He sat down and pulled off the paper and string. He opened the thin, blue book and turned over the pages quickly.

"Read that!" He held out the book to her, and tapped the right-hand page with his finger.

She read the three verses of "Truth" through slowly.

"Yes," she said, handing it back, "that's good, isn't it?"

"I found it by chance this morning in a bookshop when I was looking around. Directly I read it"—he was

talking eagerly and nervously—"I knew what I had got to do. I must find out what's true, what I can really believe in—not just what's been taught me, what I've accepted, but what is really true for me—so that I'm not pretending, not shutting my eyes, not saying I know things when I don't. I don't want to do it. It won't be easy, it will be like starting out on a journey, and not knowing where you will get to in the end, leaving everything familiar and losing everything on the way."

"Yes," she said. "It will be like Drake and those old people starting off to sail to the end of the world, and not knowing it was round, or where they would get to in the end. I used to love history at school. I often thought about them starting off from Devon on a fine morning, saying good-bye to their wives and children, not knowing if they would see them again, and going farther and farther west, still not knowing—only wanting to find out. I thought it was the best kind of adventure."

He looked at her, his face brightening at her words, as though he saw something he had not seen before. At that moment, the train slowed down to a station. Two young men got in, wearing overcoats and scarves over dinner jackets. They had evidently been playing bridge, for they discussed with much mirth the performance of somebody who had doubled two no trumps without a guard in hearts. Both of them glanced now and then at Veronica in her corner, but they took no notice of Clement, who presently dozed, leaning back against the cushions. The voices of the young men dwindled, with the roar of the train, to a distance, but Clement knew that he was travelling. The reality mingled with his

dreams so that he thought himself on the ship of truth setting out on a fine morning to find the end of the world.

XV

Rodney pushed open the gate of the vicarage garden. "Nice house," he thought. "Pity it's in such bad order. Can't help it, of course, poor devil. I bet he's hard up. It could be a topping house with a few hundreds spent on it. Nice little stable, decent garden."

Mary was running about the lawn, dressed in a woollen coat and cap and breeches. She was talking to herself all the time, telling an interminable tale about animals, intelligible only to herself. The more exciting the tale grew, the faster Mary ran from one side of the lawn to the other. She looked like some one urgently engaged on the most pressing business.

Rodney hailed her cheerfully:

"Hullo, young man! Or is it young woman? Blest if I know the difference nowadays."

Mary was a sociable child. She abandoned the tale and ran up to the visitor. She stood in front of him, taking stock of him. Her cheeks were pink, the little tendrils of brown hair curled back over the quaint woollen cap, shaped like an elf's, with a tassel hanging down from it.

"Jolly kid!" Rodney thought. "Jolly to have a kid like that—I hope we do—a boy." Aloud to Mary, he said:

"What's your name?"

"Mary Dyson."

"You're a girl, are you?"

"I'm a 'nelephant,'" replied Mary, plunging suddenly into fancy.

"Are you?" Rodney put a hand in his pocket. "Well, do you know a sweet-shop?" He held out half a crown to her.

"It's a penny," Mary said gravely.

"Well—not exactly. It'll buy more sweets than a penny."

Mary had not yet reached the age when money conveyed anything to her.

"I'm a rabbit now," she said earnestly. She turned and careered away across the grass, holding the half-crown carelessly in her hand.

Joyce opened the door to Rodney, with Michael on her arm.

"Good morning, Mrs. Dyson. Hullo, you've got another one there! I just met your daughter outside. She tells me she's a rabbit."

"She's generally something like that," Joyce said smiling, and instantly liking Rodney, as most people did. She knew him hardly at all, but she liked his handsome face and cheery smile, and his air of ease and vigour and prosperity.

"Do you want to see my husband?" she asked.

"If he's not too busy. I won't disturb him for long."

He looked down at Joyce, thinking she was a pretty little woman—the right sort for a parson's wife, not too smart, but not dowdy or too old. Dyson was a lucky fellow with that nice wife and those two jolly kids. Rodney felt a sort of envy of him, and was quite unaware that the envy was not of wife or children, but

of the unquestionable regularity of his domestic life. Veronica had been right in saying that Rodney was at heart respectable.

Rodney, who was observant in small ways, looked again at Joyce and saw that her jumper and skirt were old and shabby, and that her face was tired. A careless pity succeeded to envy. He thought they must have hard work with those two kids. He said on an impulse:

"I never seem to have seen anything of you since you came. I've been away so much. Won't you come up and dine some day?"

A wave of colour swept over Joyce's face to the roots of her fair hair. She felt herself blushing, and annoyance deepened her flush. She shifted Michael on her arm in an attempt to hide it, but Rodney had seen it, and cursed inwardly. He had forgotten for the moment that his wasn't the sort of house at present to which he could invite the parson and his wife. They probably wouldn't come, and if they did, they might be compromised with the parish or the bishop or something. A damned nuisance, the whole business, thought Rodney, very cross. He didn't like to be shunned by decent people, and Nicky not caring made it all the more annoying. She'd have to care. It was a different thing in London or Cannes, where nobody minded so much what you did, but you couldn't do the same things in the provinces.

Joyce's flush had been caused more by embarrassment, and by a startled shrinking from things she had been brought up not to talk or think of, than from any strong feeling of disapproval. She didn't know whether Clement would dine at the Grange or not. She said, rather stupidly:

"Yes, you have been away a lot, haven't you? And you have just come back for the worst weather—Clement's in here. He's only just come in. You won't be disturbing him."

"Thanks," Rodney said. "Does this one like sweets?"

He tried to press half a crown into Michael's unresponsive hand, with a confused desire to conciliate Michael's mother, and to apologize for distressing her. He was unlucky with his largesse that morning. Michael, suddenly addressed by a stranger, let the half-crown fall on the ground and burst into a wail. Joyce recovered the half-crown.

"Oh, hush, baby!" she said, rather wearily. "That's naughty! Say 'Ta' for the lovely penny. Thank you so much, Mr. Perfect. I am afraid he's too tiny yet to know his luck."

How awful, Rodney thought, to live in a houseful of squalling babies! He pushed open the dining-room door and went in.

He had never thought much about the vicar before now, partly because it had never mattered to him what sort of man he was. Now it did matter, and he took in the man and the room and everything in it.

That keen faculty of observation always seemed surprising in the easy-going Rodney, just as most people were surprised if they discovered that he was a very good man of business. He noticed the furniture, good, but old-fashioned and rather worn. It had come from Clement's father. He noticed the two neat darns in the red woollen tablecloth, the faded curtains, the small, ineffectual gas fire.

While he was unconsciously noticing all these, he looked with a new interest at Clement himself. His first thought was, "Gad, the fellow's got eyes just like the kid in the garden." It wasn't only the shape and the hazel colour. It was the clear look, the look that was much more usual in a child's eyes than in the eyes of a grown man. His second thought was, "I wonder if he gets enough to eat. I don't know what the living's worth; not enough, I bet a brass farthing. I wonder if he's going to be obstinate—he looks the sort of fellow that might be."

He said, as he sat down:

"Keeps cold, doesn't it? I'll smoke my own, if you don't mind—it's the only kind that doesn't burn my tongue. Well, I've come on business. I want to know whether you will marry me and Mrs. Veronica Marston?"

"Yes," Clement said slowly, "she spoke to me about it the other day."

"I know." Rodney frowned. He hadn't liked that. It was his business to make the arrangements.

"You know all the circumstances," he said. "Her husband—who incidentally was an infernal cad—divorced her, and she is now living with me. We shall live together, anyhow, but we should both prefer to be married, and I think it is necessary for her sake that we should be. We don't want our children to be illegitimate."

"Forgive me for asking, but why don't you get married in a registry office?"

"I don't regard that as a marriage at all," Rodney said briefly.

"It's a legal marriage." Clement was amazed at the morality which would cheerfully live with another man's

wife, but could not approve of being married in a registry's office. He saw that Rodney was serious about it, and strongly convinced. Rodney's next words betrayed the unconscious workings of his mind:

"People don't think the same of it," he said. "Not up here, anyhow. You know yourself this is a backward part of the world. Mind you, I'm not at all sure they aren't right."

Clement got up and stood with his back to the fire, looking down at Rodney, who sat comfortably in the big chair, one leg thrown over the other, his head tilted back, the pipe in the corner of his mouth.

"I've been thinking about this a good deal," Clement said, "since I met Mrs. Marston in the train. I don't mind telling you that at first I meant to refuse. I thought I ought—but as I say, I've thought a good deal since, and I'm not sure."

Rodney thought that never in his life had he seen a man look so worried over a decision. He was moved to compunction.

"Well, if you feel like that, never mind," he said. "It's for you to say. No doubt I can find a clergyman who will do it."

"Yes, I think you could—not easily, perhaps, but I think you could—I thought of that too, and I was tempted to leave it at that, but, you see, I can't. Since you've come to me in the first place, and I am your parish priest, it's my responsibility. I can't stand aside and pretend that it isn't."

"What a fuss the fellow makes," Rodney thought, in the swift reaction from his former compunction. "Why

can't he say 'yes' or 'no', instead of standing there shilly-shallying, looking as if the world was coming to an end. Damn these parsons!"

"I can't tell you now," Clement said slowly. "I'm not quite ready. I haven't made up my mind, but I'll let you know. I'll send you a note to-night or to-morrow. Will that do?"

"Oh, yes, that'll do." Rodney stood up and knocked out his pipe against the chimney piece. "I'm sorry to trouble you," he said rather stiffly. "These things are very awkward for all concerned, a messy business. Of course, I shouldn't have chosen it that way—but some things can't be helped."

He smiled at Clement as he spoke, and glanced at him. He surprised a look in Clement's eyes that he did not understand. It was almost as though this lanky, half-starved parson despised him. Yet on the whole he had been very reasonable, had not flown off the handle and talked about sin or repentance or any stuff like that. Rodney supposed that it must have been his fancy. A man in his position was rather apt to fancy scorn or censure. The more reason to put an end to the position as quickly as possible.

He went, and Clement went with him to the door of the house. On the doorstep Rodney turned.

"If we get all this fixed up," he said casually, "perhaps you and your wife will come up and dine with us one evening?"

He rather clung to the idea of having the vicar and his wife to dinner. It would be a suitable beginning to his respectable married life. Also, he was curious to see how the

vicar would take it. He reasoned in his own mind that if he asked them to come now as things were, of course they wouldn't come, but if he asked them to come after the wedding and they did come, it would show Nicky that he had been right about it.

"Thank you very much," Clement answered. He was not really thinking much about the invitation, which he took for a piece of casual politeness. He was thinking that so many things lately had turned out to be different from what he had thought them, and that Rodney was one of them.

"Well, I shall hear from you. Good-bye for the present."

Rodney tramped away down the narrow path to the gate, waving his stick to Mary on the lawn. The gate swung to behind him.

Clement sat down at his table and rested his chin on his hands. He tried to think clearly and steadily of what he ought to do. He had often been taught of the danger and disaster that follows when any human being sets up his intellect as the measure of heaven and earth, yet he was growing more and more sure now with every day that a man must live by his own judgment. To stifle it, he thought, was the sin against the Holy Ghost. Only he was not clear what his judgment was in this matter of Veronica Marston and Rodney Perfect.

He thought, "If I am really a Catholic, I believe that marriage is a sacrament, and that people once married are married until one of them dies. That is the teaching of the Church. Suppose two people are married in a registry office; the Church acknowledges the marriage, but that is not a sacrament. Suppose they get divorced; they can be

married again in a registry office. They will still be considered to be married. Would the Church consider them married? I don't know, but I suppose not. What is the difference between a marriage which is a sacrament and one which is not? One can't be broken, the other can. Yet they both count. People who live together after being married in church are all right, and people who live together after being married in registry offices are all right, but people who live together without either are sinners. Mrs. Marston and Perfect are living in sin now, but if I marry them in a month's time, they will stop living in sin. They won't be doing anything different or living in a different way, but they will be considered all right. There's something wrong somewhere."

He looked across at the chair where Rodney had been sitting a few minutes before, and his mind narrowed from the principles to the persons. He evoked the image of Rodney, standing by the fireplace knocking out his pipe. He was beginning to understand people much more acutely. He thought:

"Perfect wants to be married very much. He doesn't care about marriage being a sacrament, but he hates the present position. He's ashamed of it. He was almost apologizing for it. That means he's almost ashamed of her. Suppose they don't find a priest to marry them at all, or suppose there is a good deal of delay and difficulty, he will get more ashamed of it—of her perhaps. He's in love with her, I suppose, but he doesn't feel about her as he would about some ordinary young girl he was going to marry. If she's his wife, he'll always feel obliged to treat her decently. He is the sort of man who would always feel

that there was something owing to his wife. But it's a much rarer sort of man who would always feel that the same things were owing to his mistress. Perfect's not rare, not in that way. And if they're married in a registry office, he won't feel they're really married. He said so himself. He might go on loving her, he might be good to her, but he's much more likely to if they are married."

Across the confusion of his mind came a picture—the memory of Veronica in the corner of the railway carriage, and with it the feeling that had been in his eyes when he looked at Rodney, the feeling that Rodney was a poor thing to be ashamed of her.

He covered his face with his hands and tried to pray for enlightenment. He tried so hard that he felt as though his soul would strain out of his body, but it was as it had been lately with all his prayers. It was like some one speaking on a telephone when the line had been cut. He could not get through to God, could not hear Him, could not feel aware of Him. And again, as often, lately, the terrifying thought came to him, "Suppose God were not there? Suppose the whole gigantic fabric of Christianity were built up on the needs of men, the projection of their desperate needs and desires for help, for kindness, for security? Suppose Christ were not God, but simply a philosopher and prophet like Buddha, or Socrates, or Mahommed?" At that thought, the whole world on which he rested seemed to Clement to be slipping away from him. He jumped up. He had some letters to write, but he found it so difficult now to settle to any work for which he had to sit down and think. He had kept himself busy in the parish

lately. There were plenty of people ill at this time of the year. He had to go into Netherfield this afternoon to speak for one of his parishioners in a county court case, and he was glad when he remembered that he had a definite piece of work before him, something to occupy his restlessness. It was nearly time for lunch, and he went out to bring Mary in from the garden.

XVI

Jimmy Moorhouse was the eldest of a family of six who lived in a four-roomed house behind Ranter's Fold. Jimmy's father was a shiftless person who drank. He was a joiner, but his work was uncertain, and his spells of work were few and far between. When he made any money, he spent most of it on beer. Jimmy and the other little Moorhouses owed their food and clothing, such as they were, to the passionate energies of their mother. She had some regular work, such as cleaning the schools and the church; she went charring, she sat up all night with an invalid, she took in washing. She scraped together enough money to keep the bodies of her six children alive and decently covered. The sole purpose of her austere life was to bring them up respectable. She goaded them into good behaviour with the same furious vigour with which she scrubbed their faces for Sunday school. They were not recalcitrant. They realized very early in life that the great thing was not to be like their father.

Jimmy was a cheerful, shock-headed child, with no remarkable brains or vices. He had inherited something of his father's happy-go-lucky temper. He conformed to

the standards of good behaviour as much as most small boys, and more than many. He submitted without unreasonable protest to the scrubbing. When he left school, he became an errand boy. He brought home his weekly wages every Saturday, and handed them over to his mother, who gave him back a shilling for himself, and added the rest to the common fund. Jimmy did not object. He perfectly understood the necessity, and was rather proud of contributing to the upkeep of the family.

This went on for four years. Jimmy's sister Mabel left school, and went to be a kitchenmaid at the Grange, but Jimmy still contributed all his wages to the family, except one shilling a week. There was need that he should, for Mrs. Moorhouse was not the woman she had been, and could no longer earn as much. Fortunately, perhaps, Jimmy was slow in growing up. His tastes and recreations remained those of a schoolboy until he was nearly nineteen, when two events happened in his life.

The first was that he got a girl. Her name was Lily, and she was seventeen years old. She worked in Akeroyd's mill. She was a good-tempered, round-faced, giggling child. She wore silk stockings, patent-leather shoes, tight little hats, and a magnificent rope of Woolworth pearls. She spent at least four evenings in the week when she came home from the mill in cleaning up the house, and putting the younger ones to bed. She had many brothers and sisters running down in age from herself to twin brothers of two, whom she adored and admired, though they gave her endless trouble. On those evenings when she was not putting them to bed, she went to the pictures with several other girls, and sat with them in the fourpenny

seats, giggling and saying, "Ee-e! 'E is luvely!" "Ee-e! Isn't she sweet!"

Lily, quite unconsciously, made many new demands on Jimmy. He wanted to take her to the pictures, not only in Barnsdyke, but to the big picture house in Netherfield, three miles away, where most boys took their girls. He wanted to take her to parish dances, and to buy her sweets. Also, he began to think about his appearance. He wanted a coloured tie and socks and handkerchief to match. More than all else, with a passionate wanting, such as he had never known, he wanted a trilby hat.

Then the second event happened. He was promoted from errand boy to assistant in the grocer's shop. He wore a white linen coat, and stood behind the counter and worked the bacon-cutting machine. His heart swelled with pride, and he regarded the bacon-cutting machine as the flower and consummation of scientific invention. Naturally, he got more money. When he carried home the first week's increased wages to his mother, he ventured a hint or two. He was rather afraid of her, but he was spurred on by the thought of Lily, and by his burning desire for the trilby hat.

His mother was deaf to his hints. Perhaps she really did not take them in. She was much preoccupied. One of the younger children was ill, and she herself had been feeling a fluttering of the heart, and a queer shortness of breath. She took the money and gave him back a shilling. Then, remembering his new position, she gave him an extra shilling, and told him he was a good lad. His heart leaped, for he thought that his allowance was to be two shillings a week, but the extra shilling was a bonus, not a

rise. Next week he got his one shilling as usual. He was dejected. Even the glamour of the bacon machine paled before that desire of the moth for the star—his longing for the trilby hat.

Then came the evening when he went to take Lily for a walk, and found her going off to the pictures at Netherfield with Rudie Whitfield and Doreen Naylor, and Doreen's brother, Raymond. He met them at the door, starting off to the bus. Lily looked at him and went red. She had wondered if he would mind, but she thought perhaps he wouldn't. She hardly ever went to the big picture house at Netherfield. Girls went there with their boys, but her boy couldn't or wouldn't afford to take her, so was there any harm in going just once with Doreen and the others?

Raymond, who was good-natured and had money to spend, called out:

"Hullo, Jim. We're going to t' pictures. Come along too?"

Jim shook his head.

"No, thanks," he said, as carelessly as he could. He put his hands in his pockets and walked away. He was very nearly crying.

Two days later he was left alone in charge of the shop for an hour before closing time. He took two pound notes out of the till and slipped them into his pocket. When the shop shut, he dashed across the road to the gents' outfitters, and arrived just before the doors were shut. He said in an embarrassed voice:

"I want a trilby 'at."

He was supplied with a trilby hat of grey felt, rather

large in the brim, jaunty in the crown. It gave a surprisingly rakish air to his small figure, and pale, pimply face. He paid 5*s.* 11*d.* for it, and walked down to Lily's house.

"Come on, Lily," he said. "We're barn to t' pictures in Netherfield. We'll have ices."

Lily joyfully crammed the second twin into bed unwashed, combed up her shingle, thrust on her little felt hat and neat coat with the rabbit collar. She powdered her nose, picked up her handbag, and ran down to join Jimmy in the road. They caught their bus, and Jimmy paid their fares. He did not talk much on the way in the hot, steamy bus, but Lily was content to be silent, hugging herself in joyful anticipation. Half an hour later Jimmy sat for the first time in his life in the shilling seats, Lily snuggling at his side, the trilby hat on his head, and a hell of misery in his heart.

It was to speak for his character that Clement was going to the Netherfield police court that afternoon.

Mrs. Moorhouse was on the Netherfield bus, sitting alone on the front seat, very upright in her shabby clothes. Mrs. Green and Lily were on a seat a little behind her. Lily looked frightened, and her eyes were red and swollen. Clement sat down at the back of the bus.

He had forgotten his own preoccupations in his pity for Jimmy, and Mrs. Moorhouse and Lily. Poor Mrs. Moorhouse, with her passion for respectability, poor Jimmy with his own sudden lapse from that respectability, poor Lily with this unnatural check across her natural pleasures. No doubt she was in disgrace at home for going with a bad boy. The lines of good and bad were hard and fast

among her people. Clement wished that he could do anything for any of them, but was aware of helplessness. He wondered whether he could have done more for them if he had been a Roman priest, whether he would have known all their hearts by the confessional, and been nearer to them. He wondered if he might have been more in touch with them if he had been a Wesleyan minister, less educated, less set apart from them. He didn't know. He only knew that they were terribly pitiful, a tiny part of the pitiful world.

When the bus stopped, and they got out, he went to Mrs. Moorhouse.

"I'm very sorry about this," he said. "Poor Jimmy—I don't think they'll be hard on him. So young—and a first offence."

Mrs. Moorhouse said in a dull voice:

"I never thought that one of my children would have done such a thing, Mr. Dyson. I never thought it—after the way I brought them up."

He said, "You know anybody might do a thing like that once in their lives; I might—you might."

Mrs. Moorhouse stiffened.

"I've never touched anything that didn't belong to me, Mr. Dyson. I wouldn't, not if I were starving."

"No, no—I know," he said hastily. "Only don't you see when you are young and want things very badly, they may come over you suddenly, and carry you away for a minute."

"They shouldn't carry away a decent lad that's been brought up like our Jimmy."

Clement said thoughtfully:

"I wonder if they come more suddenly on any one who's been very well brought up."

"It's hard," she said suddenly. "I've had trouble enough all these years with Mr. Moorhouse, and I've worked and slaved for the children, and near clammed myself so they should have food and shoe leather—and now my son's a thief, and every one to know it."

"I know it's hard," Clement said gently. "But Jimmy's been a help to you all these years—and he's only stolen once."

"Stealing's stealing," Mrs. Moorhouse answered. "Whether it's once or twice or a dozen times, you can't alter it." A sob came up suddenly in her throat. "You needn't be afeard I shall be hard on the lad. 'E's my own lad, when all's said and done—but I shall never feel proud of 'im again."

They walked on together. A little way behind them Lily and her mother came together. Lily began to sob with fright.

"It serves you right for taking up with such a bad lad," Mrs. Green said mechanically. "I don't wonder you're ashamed of yourself." She had already said it a dozen times that morning.

"I'm not," Lily murmured between her sobs. "I haven't done nothing."

"Don't back-answer me, you naughty girl. This is what comes of not minding your mother." Mrs. Green spoke without the slightest regard for truth. She had known, and had never disapproved of Lily's boy. She was not really very angry with Lily, but she felt it to be her duty as a parent to improve the occasion.

"I shouldn't wonder if they were to send you to prison too for sharing the money."

Lily's sobs became noisy and half frightened. Mrs. Green began to think that she had overshot the mark.

"Never you mind, lass," she said briskly. "You stand up and speak out bold, and if the magistrate gives you any sauce, your mother'll back-answer him."

Mrs. Green's back-answering and its effects were familiar to her daughter, and the prospect did nothing to cheer her, but she managed to check her sobs as they approached the police court. She pulled her little puff out of her bag and powdered her nose in the dark doorway.

Clement looked round the dingy court and saw Jimmy with a large policeman by his side. The policeman looked like a keeper in charge of a wild animal, but Jimmy looked much more like a scared rabbit. He was a pale, undersized boy, with a thick forelock of brown hair, and a chin covered with pimples. All the scrubbing and training had not counteracted the effects of poor, inadequate food. Jimmy's mouth and hands were twitching. He looked up at his mother, reddened, and looked down quickly.

Jimmy's employer, the grocer Nettleton, was on the front bench, wishing with all his heart that he had not gone to the police about the two pounds in his first excitement. He hadn't realized that they would push the thing so far. The constable was a zealous young man, hoping for promotion. Nettleton was sorry for Jimmy, and very sorry for Mrs. Moorhouse, a decent woman who had dealt with him ever since she was married. To be sure, she never bought much, a bit of tea or sugar or bacon, but she always paid money down for what she bought, and she'd

been a good mother to all those children. He wished he'd given the lad a good talking to, and stopped the money out of his wages, only, of course, it was thieving, and he couldn't have a thief in the shop. Still, when he looked at Jimmy, and realized that he had called in the forces of the law against him, he felt as though he had taken a very large stick to beat a very small dog, and he was not happy.

Clement looked at the two magistrates—a rosy face on the right, comfortably padded, grey hair and a small grey moustache, a look of healthy stupidity; on the left, a younger face, thinner, with fairish hair growing far back, cheeks that sank in a little below the cheek bones, an expression just not bored. He hoped that they would be kind, and understand the sudden, overwhelming temptation to a boy who had never had more than two shillings at a time in the whole course of his life. He wondered if either of them had enough imagination to compass such a position. The rosy-faced man on the right was speaking.

"James Moorhouse. Well, James, did you take this money?"

Jimmy swallowed.

"Yes, sir."

"And what did you do with it?"

Jimmy's face went scarlet to the lock of hair on his forehead.

"I—I—bought a 'nat,' " he stammered.

"A what?"

"An 'at, sir—a trilby 'at."

"Oh, you bought a hat." The magistrate smiled.

"More like a lady, that, isn't it—to buy a hat with other people's money?"

The younger magistrate smiled. The clerk and the two policemen laughed. Anger, sudden and unexpected, surged up in Clement's heart, anger against that comfortable, humorous voice, that cheerful countenance, that rosy serenity. Not fair to bait the boy—not fair!

"Well, and what else did you do?" The smile of one who had made a successful joke lingered about the magistrate's lips. "You are not going to tell me you spent two pounds on a hat—even a dandy like you, eh?"

The muscles of Jimmy's throat were working. His tongue moved along his lips.

"I went to t' pictures."

The cock of the magistrate's eyebrow, resigned and humorous, seemed to say, "They all do."

"With a girl, I suppose?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

The clerk spoke to the magistrate.

"The girl is here, your worship—Lilian Green."

"Call her. I want to ask her a few questions."

Lily, looking as though she were just going to cry again, faced the magistrate. She had visibly over-powdered her face in the attempt to hide the traces of her tears. The magistrate looked at her critically.

"Well, Lilian, you went to the pictures in Netherfield last Thursday night with James Moorhouse. Do you often go there with him?"

"No, sir."

"Had you been with him before?"

"Not in Netherfield, sir," Lily murmured.

"What? Speak up, please. I can't hear."

"Not in Netherfield, sir."

"Is he a great friend of yours?"

Lily's face twitched as though in a desperate effort to keep back her tears.

"Yes, sir."

"Did he tell you where he got the money from to take you to the pictures?"

"No, sir."

"Weren't you surprised at him taking you there to the shilling seats?"

"Yes," Lily murmured.

"Ah—and don't you think that a young girl like you would be better at home helping her mother than sitting with a boy in the dark at a picture house?"

"Yes, sir," Lily answered. She did not think so, of course, but she realized that it was quite impossible to say anything else. The implication latent in that "in the dark" slipped harmlessly over her head, since she knew that it was always dark in the picture house, or how could you see the pictures?

"Not his business," Clement thought furiously. "Not his business whether she goes to the pictures or helps her mother, any more than it's hers whether he goes to his office or hunts three days a week." The violence of his own dislike surprised him. "In the dark!" he thought. "Impertinence! The man's got a horrid mind. Does sitting in judgment on other people make your mind horrid?" A line from a poem of Chesterton's drifted across his thoughts—"God's scorn for all men governing . . ."

"Is there any one else?" The magistrate looked round.

"The vicar of the parish, your worship, to speak for the young man's character."

"Oh, yes." The magistrate glanced at the paper before him.

"The Reverend Clement Dyson, Vicar of St. Michael and All Angels', Barnsdyke. I am afraid they are not all angels, Mr. Dyson."

The clerk and the policeman laughed again. The reporter scribbled a note on his pad. The magistrate glanced more sharply at Clement's unsmiling face. One of these High Church parsons, he supposed—a long thin fellow, looking—what was the word—ascetic. They were always the most difficult sort to get on with.

"Do you know the boy, Mr. Dyson? What have you to say about him?"

"I know him very well, your worship. He has been working for Mr. Nettleton as an errand boy for the last four years. During that time he has contributed almost the whole of his wages to help with the younger ones at home. He was only promoted from errand boy to shop assistant about three weeks ago, and has no doubt been excited and rather off his balance. I think that this must be almost the first time he has spent any sum of money on his own pleasures. I should like to ask you to take as lenient a view of the case as possible."

"Have you generally believed him to be a youth of good character?"

"Certainly. I have always had a great respect for him for doing what I certainly could not have done myself at the same age." "Nor you either," he added mentally.

The magistrate looked at Clement as though he were not sure whether he had not said something slightly improper.

"Oh," he said dryly, "Thank you."

Clement sat down again, aware that the magistrate disliked him as much as he disliked the magistrate. Through a sort of mist of anger, he heard Jimmy bound over for two years. The mist cleared, and he saw again distinctly, the full, red face under the grey hair, and heard the magistrate speaking.

"Next time a heavier penalty. I hope you will remember the difference between 'mine' and 'thine.' I hope you will not let your pleasure-seeking instincts override common honesty and the ten commandments. It is this thirst for pleasure and sensation, this perpetual dashing to picture houses in the evening, that is getting so many of you young people into trouble. Pleasure-seeking is the curse of the rising generation."

The reporter scribbled vigorously. Jimmy, looking dazed and bewildered, was led out by the policeman. Mrs. Moorhouse, Lily, and her mother were leaving the court. Clement followed mechanically. He found them standing, an uncertain group, on the pavement outside. Jimmy stood behind his mother, a little apart from the others. He looked beaten. Self-respect was a terrible loss in one who had so little else to lose. The look on the boy's face was as though he had walked into a wall and been stunned by the impact. Clement walked up to him and shook his hand.

"That's that, Jimmy. Forget it. It's all over now. If I'd been in your place, I'd probably have done the same thing —any one might. You're all right."

Unpriestly consolations—but as he looked at the boy's hopeless face, he couldn't feel that anything mattered so much as the end of that hopelessness. Was it because the magistrate had been so much inclined to preach that he

couldn't feel anything but sympathy with the criminal? He couldn't feel at the moment that repentance was the first thing that Jimmy needed; he needed to think less of what he had done, not more. And he didn't know how to make him think less of it. Another person was always a closed box of secrets; you couldn't tell what springs to touch, what handle to turn—it might be dangerous as well as impertinent to thrust a hand into that delicate mechanism. Clement, eager to comfort, but afraid of intruding, looked helplessly at the bent head and slouched shoulders.

"Well, cheer up, Jimmy. I'll see you tomorrow."

He walked off and left them. Better leave them to themselves just now—they would be happier without him, less constrained. It was so difficult, he reflected, for a parson to avoid being a constraint, however much he wanted not to be. He would be glad of the four-mile walk home.

He swung along in the fading light of the grey afternoon, until he came out from between the houses on to the high road that was cut like a terrace out of the side of the hill. A wind was blowing down the valley, keen and cold. He passed a row of new concrete houses, then a field or two, ploughed for the spring sowing, and an old grey farm standing back from the road, square built, with clustering farm buildings, an orchard, haystacks, one of the many relics of an agricultural age in an industrial countryside. His mind wandered to it. Queer how the two were jumbled up together in this part of the world, the cornfield by the mill yard, the orchards between the pit shafts, the farms and ploughlands cheek by jowl with the machines. The new world had never quite obliterated the old. There were no clear divisions here of town and coun-

try. In forgotten corners, in stray nooks and hidden places, the old world lived on. . . . He climbed a slope, looked back and saw the lights of Netherfield, and a lighted tram creeping towards it along a far-off road. His mind went back to Jimmy, and his indignation revived. Yet what, after all, was he so indignant about . . . ?

"They weren't hard on him," he reflected. "He couldn't have got off more lightly. You can't have people stealing whenever they like. Laws are all right, you must have them, and you must have people to administer them, but it was the way he did it. To tell that child that she ought to be helping her mother at home was unwarrantable interference, and to call Jimmy pleasure-seeking, when the trouble is he's never had the chance to seek any pleasure, was absurd—and to make jokes about a prisoner up for sentence is the last word in cads' tricks—yet that sort of thing is done all over the country in the name of morality, and nobody minds. There's something terribly wrong with our idea of morality. It's better to steal two pounds like Jimmy than to make fun of Jimmy for having stolen it—but Jimmy gets bound over, and the magistrate gets respectfully quoted in the papers for doing his duty and upholding decency—and the worst of it is, he probably thinks he is. Why doesn't every one see that the world's all upside down?" As that question drifted through his mind, it was followed by another—"Why need it be upside down if God made it?" He revolved these two questions in his mind during the rest of the walk home, but to neither did he find any satisfactory answer.

He was in the study that night when Joyce came in with the Netherfield evening paper in her hand.

"There's something about you in the evening paper, Clem. They must have mixed up something you said. The milkman brought a paper to show Doris, and she showed it to me."

He looked up absently from a letter he had just finished writing.

"What, dear?"

She spread out the paper on the table, folded it back and showed him the paragraph.

"Look—there it is."

The paragraph was headed in large capitals:

"Magistrate speaks out about pleasure-seeking younger generation."

Below in smaller capitals was printed:

"Vicar 'respects' young criminal."

Joyce looked at him while he was reading it. She was annoyed and distressed, and a little uneasy. It had startled her to see Clement's name in the paper. They had made some stupid muddle, she supposed, or invented something that he had never said—but he did say unaccountable things sometimes. She had noticed it especially just lately. He said things that rather frightened her because she knew instinctively that ordinary people wouldn't like them. She didn't mind herself, it was just Clem thinking aloud, but she didn't want him to get into the habit of thinking aloud in public. It might upset the parish or the other clergy. He would look into things instead of taking them for granted. Joyce knew, without thinking it out, that it was safer and more peaceful to take things for granted.

"Yes," Clement said, laying down the paper. "I daresay

I did say that—I don't remember exactly. Anyhow, it doesn't matter. I do respect Jimmy."

Joyce looked at him doubtfully.

"I'm sorry for poor Mrs. Moorhouse," she said. "I don't know what she'll do without Jimmy's money coming in. I wonder if Nettleton will take him on again?"

"I think so; he's a very decent fellow. He was sorry about it. I shall ask him to, anyhow."

"Yes, do." She went out, still feeling rather uneasy, without knowing why. Sometimes she thought that when she and Clement were talking, they never seemed to feel the same parts of the conversation the important ones, and this suggestion of gulfs between them disturbed her.

When she had gone, Clement read through the letter that he had just written:

DEAR PERFECT,

I am willing to marry you and Mrs. Marston. Perhaps you will let me know about dates and arrangements. My good wishes to both of you for your happiness.

Yours sincerely,

CLEMENT DYSON.

He folded the letter, put it in an envelope, stamped and addressed it. That done, he propped his elbows on the table and covered his face with his hands.

"God grant that I have done right," he prayed, and wondered if it was because of his sins and shortcomings that he could not find God, or feel certain of any answer. He did not know how far his decision had been determined by the events of the day, or by the conviction which they had strengthened, that it was better to be among the condemned than the condemning.

XVII

Veronica sat in front of her dressing table with a book propped open against the frame of the mirror. Once or twice, as she read, she put up a hand mechanically and smoothed the already smooth ripples of her hair. She rubbed the short hairs on her neck. Rodney liked to touch them, and to run his fingers up under the dark curls and turn her head round towards him.

Rodney came through from his dressing room, kicking open her door with his foot. He was still in his dressing gown.

"Hullo!" he said. "You're ready, are you? Am I going to be late?"

"I shouldn't wonder."

"Ah, well, they're sure to be later. Parsons always are."

"I don't know where you get your mysterious knowledge of the church from, Rodney."

"One of my godfathers was an archdeacon. He was a damned stingy old bird; he never remembered my birthday."

"Neither do I. I don't believe I even know when it is."

"I'll write it down for you." Rodney sat down on the end of the bed.

"Are you looking forward to your first dinner party, Mrs. Perfect?"

"Yes, I think so—only . . ."

"Only what?"

"I wish I was sure that they would really like coming."

"If you ask me, I should think they would like coming a damn sight more than we shall like having them."

"Why? I thought you wanted to have them."

"I did—but I don't think it will be one of our bright evenings."

"I think it will be quite fun. I like the vicar, and Mrs. Vicar looks nice."

"Oh, yes, she's all right. Do you suppose they play bridge?"

"I don't know, but you can always play the radio to them."

"Yes, I can," Rodney agreed, brightening—brightening very considerably as he ran over in his mind the stations that he might be able to get after dinner. He rose from the bed.

"Well, I'd better get on. Nicky, I love that dress."

"Yes, so do I." Veronica smiled at the image of it in the glass. It was a black lace dress with a cluster of crimson flowers on the shoulder.

When Rodney had gone out, she went on looking at herself in the glass. She studied with an enquiring gaze the pale, oval face, the red lips, the firm chin, the hyacinth blue eyes.

"I wonder," she thought, "if Mrs. Vicar thinks I'm a bad woman? I wonder if I am a bad woman? I don't feel it. Shouldn't I know if I was? The truth is, I haven't any feeling of goodness or badness about those things. I have about other things. I know jolly well that anything cruel or mean is bad. What is goodness or badness? Does any one know? Does that vicar know? I don't think he does. He's not like most of them. I wonder if goodness is a separate thing for each person—for each person to be what

they think decent, and do what they think decent? The worst of it is, directly they think a thing decent for themselves, they start thinking it decent for other people, and from that they go on very quickly to thinking other people indecent. It sometimes seems as if the more decencies a person has, the more they think other people haven't. But that's not goodness. Real goodness is like somebody loving you, and yet knowing what you're like. It's like I love Rodney. I suppose it's like God loves us, if there is a God, and He does love us. I thought not in that last year with Claud, but I think now there is. I don't know—one can't be sure—but even then, I had a sort of feeling of Somebody there. It's the same sort of feeling I have that I shall go on after I die. The Ship of Truth—mine's so very small it's almost a raft—but I'd rather have my own raft than some one else's liner."

She gave a queer little nod to the pretty face in the glass.

"Well," she mused, "it's a funny world."

She tucked her book under her arm, picked up her bag and shawl, and went downstairs.

XVIII

Joyce was getting ready to go and dine at the Grange. She was brushing her hair before the glass and singing at the same time in a soothing undertone to Michael, who lay wide awake in his cot. He would be particularly lively and wakeful on the night when she was going out! Yet she could not really feel annoyed with him when he stood up

and thumped on the bars of his cot, his cheeks rosy after his bath, his hair standing up in one fat curl.

"Lie down, baby," she said as sternly as she could. She sang on softly:

"Come, lasses and lads, get leave of your dads,
And away to the maypole hie,
For every fair has a sweetheart there,
And a fiddler standing by.
And Johnny shall dance with Jane . . ."

Michael, who had been shouting and prancing a minute before, fell sound asleep with the amazing quickness of small children. Joyce breathed a sigh of relief. One thing to the good, anyway. She picked up her dress and slipped it over her head.

Her feelings about the evening were mixed, but on the whole, she didn't want to go. Of course, it was a change, and Clement had been so pleased at the idea of her going out to dinner again, but his pleasure had been rather tentative because he wasn't sure how she felt about the whole business. She wasn't sure herself. Deep in her heart she didn't think Clement ought to have married them, and she was dreadfully afraid that he would get into trouble about it. Deep in her heart she was also sure that she wasn't going to like Mrs. Marston—Mrs. Perfect now, she supposed. She was sure that she was fast and fashionable, and empty-headed, and only liked men. Part of Joyce's hostile feeling was pure nervousness. She went out so little now. She hadn't worn her evening dress since they were in Liverpool last August, except once at Christmas at the parish dance. It was a narrow, beaded dress of mauve

crêpe de Chine. She had had some long georgette sleeves put in it for wearing in the parish, but she had taken them out this morning. Her arms were pretty, round and white, though her hands were spoilt, she thought ruefully. Too much housework and too little time to take care of them. Her hair was soft and bright, though she always felt that it looked unfinished beside the beautifully trimmed and curled heads that every one had nowadays. She was rather pale and looked tired, as she was, for she had been busy since seven o'clock that morning. Still, there was a pleasure in being nicely dressed again. She fastened round her neck the string of imitation pearls she had bought in Melchester, wondering if they looked common. Everybody seemed to wear them. She went to the door of the little room leading off hers, where Mary slept, and which Clement used as a dressing room.

Mary was awake, of course, and, of course, talking. As Joyce opened the door, she heard the small voice:

"And then I jumped on a horse, and I rode and I rode till I comed to Miss Abbott's shop."

"What did you do then?"—Clement's voice, very much interested.

"I gived Miss Abbott a penny, and I said, 'Please give me three—four—six—lumps of sugar for my kind horse.'"

"And did she?"

"Yes, she gived me as many as five—and then I jumped on the horse, and I rode and I rode and I——" Mary's invention suddenly failed her. She handed over the job to her collaborator. "What did I do then, Daddy?"

"She ought to be going to sleep, Clem." Joyce stood in the doorway, smiling at them.

"Oh, Mummy!" Mary cried, her eyes widening in admiration. She took a deep breath and paid the highest compliment she knew: "Oh, birthday Mummy!"

"Yes, isn't she?" Clement said. "Joyce, you do look nice!"

Suddenly Joyce no longer felt tired or nervous. Their admiration warmed her into confidence. What did outside people matter when her own people loved and admired her? Probably that poor woman's first husband had been unkind to her, and she hadn't any children—Joyce could not imagine a marriage complete without children, and from the height of her proud possession of Mary and Michael, she felt sorry for Mrs. Perfect. She indulged in a rare flight of imagination. Perhaps, later, Mrs. Perfect would have a baby, and, of course, would not know how to look after it, poor little thing, after the frivolous life she had led. Perhaps she, Joyce, would come to the rescue with good advice and experience culled from her struggles with Mary and Michael. It would be a tiny, delicate little baby, not like hers, and the Perfects would be terribly grateful to her.

She kissed Mary and tucked her in.

"Go to sleep, sweetheart. In the morning I'll tell you all about the party."

Mary lay down and obediently shut her eyes.

"Will there be a cake with candles?"

"I'm afraid it's not that sort of party. Good night, darling. Doris is downstairs, you know; she will hear if

you call. She won't go to bed till we come back. Are you ready, Clem? I'll just slip my coat on."

XIX

"Is it being a success?" Veronica thought, taking her cup of coffee off the tray. "I don't know. It wasn't bad at dinner. Rodney was so funny and jolly. He is good at anything like that—he makes himself sound such a fool, that any one feels happy with him. They loved all those stories of his about not being able to speak French and being so bullied in the Customs. Funny how English people do so like the idea of being fools abroad and not being able to make themselves understood by foreigners. Rodney's got an awful accent, but I know, and he knows, that he makes all the French officials skip round as if he was the Lord High Executioner."

She looked across at Joyce, who was talking to Rodney. Clement had drifted to a bookcase.

"All the same," she thought, "we didn't really mix. Rodney doesn't much like the vicar. I'm not sure, but I think the vicar doesn't much like Rodney—I am quite sure Mrs. Dyson doesn't much like me. I wish she did; she's a pathetic thing. Oh, God, what a life! And she's made herself look so nice, and she's so plucky about it all. But we sha'n't be friends—I could, perhaps, but she won't —can't. No, perhaps I couldn't either. I don't think she wants friends, she's so wrapped up in the house and children—and in him. She's fond of him—yes, fonder than of the house and children. She doesn't follow his mind at all. He's nice. He's like a nice, intelligent boy—but he's

awfully bothered about something. I think it's this religion business. He laughs and talks and forgets about it, but you can see it coming back into his eyes. Well, I must go and talk to her."

Rodney, after ascertaining that Clement played bridge but Joyce did not, strolled over to the radio and pulled out a plug, murmuring something about seeing what 2LO are doing for us. Veronica moved across to a seat near Joyce.

"Have you got a radio at the vicarage?"

"No, we haven't."

"You're lucky. It's awful, once you get really bitten—Rodney's crazy. We take his portable set every time we go out in the car."

"Do you?"

"We nearly had a smash the other day because I got Stuttgart and Rodney was so thrilled he forgot he'd left the car in gear, and it began to run downhill into a wall."

"How awful!"

Joyce shook herself mentally. What was the matter with her? She must pull herself together and talk. For one thing she was very sleepy, sitting by the warm fire, and so very tired after her long day's work. For another, she was oppressed by a leaden consciousness of being out of her element. She had felt it all through dinner, even while Rodney was making her laugh. Her dress wasn't good enough, her hair wasn't right, she had no powder or lipstick on, and though she told herself that she didn't like to see people made up, she irrationally wished that she was. She couldn't talk about any of their things. She had never been abroad, she couldn't drive a car, she hadn't been to

a theatre for six months, she hadn't read any of the latest books. The only things she could talk about were the house and the children and the parish, and those were things that they knew as little about as she did about the Riviera. Still, she must make an effort of some sort. She was being positively rude. She said hastily:

"Mary—my small daughter—isn't the least bit interested in cars, but she's absolutely mad about horses—any animals, in fact. She knows every horse and pony for miles round. She was dreadfully upset the other day when the milkman's pony was sold, but she has already made friends with the new one."

"Has she really?" Veronica said. Then because she was better at the game than Joyce, and also much less tired, she added:

"How old is Mary?"

"Nearly four."

"That's very tiny to be so interested in horses, isn't it?"

"Yes, I think it is rather—but I think she's rather forward for her age—probably because she's been so much with us. She's got the most extraordinarily vivid imagination."

"Has she? What sort of things does she like imagining?"

"Oh, well——" Joyce stopped. Impossible to suppose that this worldly and complete person, with all her travels and experiences, really wanted to know what sort of things an unknown baby girl liked imagining. "She says all sorts of funny things," she said lamely. "I told her I was going to a party to-night, and she asked if there was going to be a cake with candles on."

"Tell her we sha'n't have that till she comes herself. When she comes, we'll have a very special party, with candles on everything."

"She'd love that," Joyce said, smiling. "It's funny how they like anything burning, isn't it? One day I found Mary poking a piece of paper between the bars of the grate."

"You must have been scared!"

"I was. The maid was in the room with her, and she had never noticed. It is so difficult to get one that you can safely leave in charge of the children. The one we have now is very good with them and fond of them, but she's an awfully bad cook."

Joyce realized suddenly that she was getting like those friends of her mother's, who had bored her when she was a girl because they talked about nothing but children and servants. Veronica thought, looking at her, "She can't be thirty yet—oh, poor kid!" Aloud she said:

"Would you come into Melchester to a matinée with me one day in the car—or to have a look round the shops? It's so dull going alone—I've really nothing to do when Rodney's at the works."

"Thank you, I should like to," Joyce said. She wasn't sure that she would like to. She would be shy of spending a whole afternoon with Mrs. Perfect, and it might cost something—she would have to offer to pay for her seat, and there might be tips, and tea. Besides, she suspected dimly that Mrs. Perfect was sorry for her. A person like that, always going to places and being amused and entertained, couldn't know how happy she was at home, she thought passionately. She couldn't know how much more

exciting were Mary and Michael than any cars or matinées. She probably thought it was a dull life. She couldn't know how everything your babies did was amusing or exciting, so that you couldn't be dull all day long. Joyce had the insecure feeling of one who has made herself content and suddenly discovers that her contentment seems impossible to some one else.

Rodney was twirling and twisting the knobs of the radio. Now and again, he talked over his shoulder to Clement at the bookcase. He talked in a friendly, casual tone, but Veronica knew just how bored he was, and how much he was wishing the evening were over. He didn't, she thought, like very many kinds of people. He wasn't curious, didn't want to know how other people lived, didn't care what they thought. She herself liked all those things. Why did she love him so much, so much that she felt as though the room were warm when he was in it, and cold and dark when he went out? He looked round from the radio and smiled at her. Her eyes sent him a message of amused sympathy and of affection.

Clement, by the bookcase, glanced up from the book in his hand. He looked with pleasure at Joyce and Veronica sitting side by side. He was so glad that Joyce was making new friends and having a little change. He looked at her again, and wondered if she were really enjoying it. Then, because, like Veronica, he was sensitive to those unseen currents that run between four people in a room together, he knew that she was not. He received the faint disapproval which she was unconsciously transmitting. For a second he was annoyed with her. The annoyance was fol-

lowed by a swift reaction, an uprising of pity and tenderness.

"What have you got there?" Veronica asked him.

He came over to the fire carrying the book.

" 'The Icelandic Ballad of Tristram.' "

"I don't think I know it."

"Don't you? It's one of the things I think is really perfect, so absolutely right that it couldn't be better."

"No, I don't know it. Do you, Mrs. Dyson? Read it to us. We'll throw something at Rodney if he makes too much noise."

Clement began to read:

"Isolt goes from the sea inland.
The street was long,
And ever she heard the bells ringing
The goodly song.

"Isolt went from the sea inland,
The way was straight;
And ever she heard the bells ringing
As she came thereat.

"Then she spake, the fair Isolt,
From over the foam.
'Nay, but Tristram should not die
When I come home.' "

A series of squeals from the radio interrupted him.

"Shut up, Rodney," Veronica called out.

"Sorry, I was just getting it." The noise abated.

"Out on the floor the priest was standing
With tapers fair.
Queen Isolt came where Tristram lay
And knelt there."

Rodney gave a final twirl to the radio, and the overture to the "Freischütz" burst full and clear into the room.

Joyce looked at Clement, remembering how, when they were first engaged, he used to take books out of the shelves in her own home and begin to read aloud to her. She had never listened particularly to what he read—she had sat thinking how clever he was, and what a nice voice he had. She did not listen now—she was not interested—but she saw that Veronica was interested, and that annoyed her. She thought that Veronica was trying to be clever.

Veronica was much less interested in the poem than in the fact that Clement liked it so much. Her mind apprehended a little of that longing in him which it satisfied, of the longing for beauty, for that quickening and sharpening of life into a sword pricking home to the heart that is called romance. She wondered how that longing would be appeased.

Clement read on to himself, unconscious of the music three feet away from him:

"To many a man in the world is given
Sorrow and pain.
The Queen knelt down and died there, Isolt,
Where he lay slain.

"Out on the floor the priests they stood,
Their dirges said.
The bells of gold were rung for Isolt,
And Tristram dead."

As he read, the lines made small, clear pictures in his mind, bright-coloured, and yet remote, like the pictures in

a dream. He saw a church and a long street running towards it inland from the sea. He saw a woman who walked along it, with the wind throwing back her veil and the skirts of her dress. In his mind she had the face of Veronica, and she walked steadily, looking ahead, and went in at the doorway of the church and up to the bier where Tristram lay, and stood there between the lighted candles, as still as they and as ardent.

The overture to the "Freischütz" came to an end. Rodney turned round to Joyce.

"There," he said, "that was Cologne. What do you think of that for transmission?"

XX

John Caldicott turned in at the gateway of the bishop's palace. He was going on to spend a night at one of the branch houses of the community whose sisters worked in his parish, and he carried a little black bag of the shape and pattern peculiar to the clergy. He walked fast, yet with a deliberate, heavy gait. While he walked, he rehearsed in his mind the various things which he hoped to have an opportunity of saying to the bishop. He neither liked nor approved of the bishop. His attitude towards him was the attitude of a captain or major in the line towards a General or Staff Officer. He thought that the bishop did no work, as a rule, but was a nuisance when he did. It was his private opinion that all the real warfare of the Church militant was waged by him and by other conscientious parish priests, while bishops abode elegantly behind the lines, writing chits which were usually inap-

plicable to the circumstances, and which therefore must be disregarded as far as possible.

The bishop was waiting for John Caldicott with mixed feelings. He did not like him. No one set in authority over John Caldicott ever had liked him. On the other hand, the bishop had a certain respect for him, and, what was more to the point, a firm conviction that he would be the very man for an unpleasant job. The bishop was a man of tact and courtesy, of some learning, and of much ability. He fully appreciated the disturbances and divisions in the Church, and felt confident that he would be able to deal with them in his own diocese. He wanted to be fair to all parties. He did not want any unpleasantness. They must all learn to shake down together, and each must give way to the other in small matters. The bishop would hold the balance with perfect impartiality, as he could do, for he was perfectly impartial, though "impartial" was not the word used by John Caldicott in speaking of him. It was the word which the bishop used himself. He would have thought it a great pity if he had had any strong feelings or violent convictions in matters of churchmanship. It would have put him out of sympathy with many of his clergy who held opposite views and practices.

"Good morning, Caldicott," the bishop said. "I am glad to see you again—it is a little time since we met. Sit there, won't you? Are you keeping well?"

"Yes, thank you, my Lord."

"I always think this is the most trying time of the year, especially in the North."

"Yes, I think it is."

The bishop rearranged a heap of papers on the table.

"I really asked you to come and see me because I want your help. It is this very difficult business of the Vicar of Barnsdyke. You heard about it, of course?"

"Yes."

"I believe you know him very well?"

"At one time I saw a good deal of him. I have not seen him so much lately, except that he came over a few weeks ago to read a paper for me."

"He said nothing to you then of his intention to remarry a divorced woman?"

"No, my Lord. I thought him overstrained and tired, and urged him to take a holiday. I know he has not had an entire holiday for over two years."

"A great mistake." The bishop shook his head. "Nothing does a man so much good as to get right away from his work."

"I am sure you think so," was in Caldicott's mind, but he answered:

"It is not always possible, my Lord, for the poorer clergy."

"No, no. Do you think that the line he has taken in this matter can be in any way due to overstrain, though?"

"I think that it may have been the outcome of a sort of general impatience. I have seen a good many priests, younger men, affected more or less suddenly by that impatience. Sometimes they go over to Rome. More often they get over it and settle down. Sometimes they throw themselves into new work—perhaps in the missionary field or in another parish. I think it is a very common phase in the life of a priest, or, for that matter, in the life of any Catholic."

"It is very unfortunate that it should have taken this form," the bishop said, meaning that it was much more inconvenient for him than if Clement had proceeded to Rome or to the mission field.

"Very, my Lord," Caldicott said dryly, knowing what he meant.

"I am very loath to ask him to resign his living, especially in view of what you say. Is he married?"

"Yes, my Lord, and two children."

"But I cannot leave the matter as it stands. I must have his assurance that he will not do it again, and some expression of regret or apology. A thing like this cannot pass unnoticed. I asked you to come and see me because I thought that you would be very much the best person to talk to him about it. You have been in the diocese so much longer than I have, and I know how great an influence you have over the younger clergy. Also, I understand that his views are very much the same as yours?"

"I have always thought so, my Lord."

"I mean, of course, except in this one matter—and that, I think we are agreed, is most likely to be a sort of outburst of impatience. I think the rebuke would come better from you, whose opinions he would share and acknowledge."

There was a pause. Caldicott knew that the bishop had shifted one of his own burdens on to his shoulders, and accepted it, mentally shrugging those shoulders.

"Very well, my Lord—and if he refuses to make any expression of regret, or to give any assurance for the future?"

"I am really afraid that he must—but we need not

trouble ourselves about that at present. I am quite sure you will be able to make him see reason."

The two men stood up.

"You'll stay and have some lunch, I hope?"

"Thank you, my Lord; I have to get the twelve train on."

"I am sorry. I get so few opportunities of seeing you."

"I am always to be found in my parish," Caldicott answered. He could not repress that. It was a grievance with him that the bishop had not found time to visit St. Paul's.

The bishop ignored it.

"You will let me hear from you after you have seen Dyson?"

"Yes, my Lord. I will see him this week."

"Thank you. I shall be very much obliged to you."

The bishop went to his study and sat down. He was greatly relieved that Caldicott had been obliged to go, and that the interview was over. It was not pleasant to be despised, even by one whom he himself despised as narrow, intolerant, and rude. He began to feel sorry for the erring Dyson. He did not know that his emissary was feeling more leniently disposed towards him than he had felt since he had first heard of the remarriage. His strong sympathy with the parish priest, as opposed to the bishop, was working in his mind in Clement's favour. A definite misdoing seemed to him less reprehensible than the attitude which he described to himself as Laodicean, and as he settled himself in the train, he was thinking less of Clement's shortcomings than of the shortcomings of his right reverend Father in God.

XXI

Clement was walking along the ridge of hills above Barnsdyke. He could see the straggling village below him in the valley, and the black smoke rising from the chimneys of Akeroyd's mill. He could see across the valley another straggling village huddled against the slope of the hill. Farther down the valley, he could see the church tower of Netherfield rising above the house roofs, piercing with its delicate spire the thick haze of smoke that hung over the town. The railway line ran across the farther side of the valley, and a train was puffing its way along, leaving a thinning trail of smoke behind it. All the valley was full of the labour and the life of men, but up here on the hillside there were only the grey-coloured sheep with black faces that wandered among the heather roots and coarse grass.

Clement had some sandwiches in his pocket, and had come up here for the day to think out the great problem that was weighing on his mind. Instead, his mind began to take holiday. It was a fine day of mid-February with bright sunshine. Promise of life and spring were in the air; the faint, indescribable smell of spring rose from the grass, from the bracken stumps, from the very earth. There were no hedgerows in this hill country, but only jagged dry walls of stone, fashioned cunningly by the hands of men who had learned the secret of it from their fathers, as they had learned it from their fathers before them.

Clement followed a narrow track across the fields,

climbing the walls by the steps of worn stone that projected on either side. After he had walked for some time, he sat down on a wall and lit a pipe. The grassy slopes of the field ran down below his feet to a small wood. He could see how the trees were thickening with the new life running through their veins. The sunlight was on the wood, and in the sunlight the colour of it was brown, the brown of swelling buds. The outlines of the trees were no longer sharp, but soft, blurred with the new growth that was like a soft bloom on a grape. The tobacco was sweet in Clement's mouth and nostrils. The exercise and the clearer air of the high places had brought him a feeling of bodily comfort and well-being. He had one of his exquisite moments of happiness in the mere fact of existence, and in the rich bounty of it: the unnecessary beauty of twig and leaf, of every tiny patch of moss on the stones, the infinite varieties of pleasure of which one human being is capable in the course of a day—pleasures of affection and companionship, of intelligence, of humour, of anticipation, of memory—tiny pleasures of sight and taste and sound and smell. A triumphant sense of the fullness of life filled all his veins, like the sap rising in the trees, and he was happy with the mere happiness of living.

He thought to himself:

"When there is so much in the world, why don't we just enjoy it? What is there to do really but live as we can without worrying—live like trees and animals? Why can't we? Why is it that there is always something worrying us, something goading us on to think about things and find out things, and try to do things? We shall die and lose all this, and no one knows if we shall get anything

else. Flowers grow and die, and the life that was in them goes back into the ground, and other flowers spring up—but not the same flowers. Suppose we are like that—the little shapes that for a short time life has filled?"

He took the pipe from his mouth and sat staring before him at a tuft of last year's bracken. There were a hundred colours of tawny russet, orange, and gold in the tough stalks and broken, spreading leaves. Again it seemed to him that a man might be so satisfied by the things that each day offered him that he need not look beyond them, and again he was aware of that something urgent and restless in him that would not let him be content. He got down from the wall and walked on across the uneven ground. The short turf was springy beneath his feet. In a damp hollow near a small spring he found a root of celandines in flower. He bent down to look at them, remembering that as a child he had called their leaves "fairy spades", and that he had tried to drink raindrops out of the flower-cups, only the water always ran out between the petals.

"I must bring Mary up here," he thought. "I could carry her up the steep part of the road." Then he remembered that Mary would not be here much longer. She would have no home in Barnsdyke, perhaps no home at all, since her father had lost his faith and must resign his living.

For that was what he had come up here to-day to decide, not knowing that in his heart the decision was already made. Should he go on with his work, holding on by blind obedience when faith was dead in him? No doubt some had done it and were doing it. Should he go patiently on, administering sacraments that now meant noth-

ing to him, teaching what he did not believe, baptizing children into a faith that he did not hold? Should he compel himself to believe by sheer force of will, or at least to behave as though he believed, hoping that some day the dead faith might quicken in him? Some men might have made themselves believe. He could not do it. He could not stay here and teach others when he himself had no conviction.

"It wouldn't be fair," he thought. "It would be the blind leading the blind. I couldn't do it."

He had come to a gate between two fields. He leaned his arms on the top bar and looked over it down the valley. He tried to remember the beginnings of his doubts and their gradual increase, but the whole process had been so instinctive and unconscious that it was hard for him to get any clear idea of it. He remembered that before Christmas he had thought himself getting slack, and had made more time for prayer and meditation.

"But I believed at Christmas," he thought. "Why don't I believe now? I knew as much then as I know now. It wasn't any more improbable then that God made the world and that He became flesh than it is now. I knew then that the myth of redemption by the God in human form occurred in most pagan religions. I knew then that there was no way of proving the existence of God. Only then I believed, so none of these things mattered. Now I don't believe. There is not one thing of all the things I have been taught that I can be sure of. Is it my fault? Was I wrong when the first doubts began to let something inside me drive me on to probe and test and see what I really did believe? No, it can't have been wrong." He re-

peated it to himself with passion: "To stifle any truth in yourself is wrong, to deceive yourself, to pretend to believe. That's why I must go. I can't do it."

He shifted his elbows on the gate and rested his chin on his hands.

"Am I exalting my own intellect? Caldicott would say so—I don't think I am. I don't expect to understand. It isn't my intellect that's let me down. I never did understand, never thought I did. It's the other that's gone—the feeling, and knowing, the loving. Then am I making too much of my emotions? I may be, but—what has a man to go by but the feeling of truth in him? It all comes back to the same thing. I can't go against that—I daren't. 'Man with his burning soul Has but an hour of breath To build a ship of truth.' I've known really what was going to happen ever since I read that poem."

He opened the gate, walked through and shut it behind him. The path ran down into the valley, coming out by the old milldam of Akeroyd's mill, the old mill that had been held all night long against the Luddite rioters in the bitter days of the old troubles. He turned aside from the path, crossed the field, and climbed again towards the high shoulder of the hill. A sudden burst of energy possessed him, so that he wanted to walk and walk, right up, away from the very sight of the valley. He wanted to be on the crest of the hill, so that he could see the other hills beyond, with nothing between him and the wide, pale arch of the sky.

"Poor Joyce!" he thought, as he walked. His heart sank like a stone with remorse and pity. It would be hard on

her. Every way that he looked at it, it would be hard on her. She would have to go back to her mother's for a bit and take the children until he could get some sort of work to keep them. He had sixty pounds a year of his own; that would keep her and the children in clothes, and perhaps pay something towards their keep. Joyce's people were not well off. But it was not only the loss of their income. Joyce would be shocked and startled. He knew, though he did not say it even to himself, that he would never make Joyce understand. He did not know what she believed herself. Strange to think that he had lived so close to her without knowing, had said his prayers by her side, had given her the Sacrament in church, and yet he did not know whether her faith were a living flame, or a strongly engrained habit, or a comfortable support. He thought that perhaps women believed differently, more by instinct and less by reason. They seemed to trouble themselves less about things that were hard to reconcile. Women came to church far more than men. "Perhaps they need it more," he thought. "They've always had the worst of it, or perhaps they see clearer than we do, or perhaps they believe more easily because they are better, more loving, more unselfish. I don't know."

He remembered then his talk in the train with Veronica Marston. He thought, "I should be able to make her understand why I must do it. She understood what I meant better than any one I have ever spoken to. She has had to meet things and think them out. She knows much more about life than I do."

He had climbed to the crest of the hill and could see the farther valley. The shadows were blue and soft. The sun-

light lay on the rounded slopes of the hills. He sat down on a boulder of limestone and took out his lunch, a packet of hard-boiled egg sandwiches, a packet of cheese, and a large slice of cake. He was hungry, and ate them with enjoyment. They had, besides their own individual tastes, the common flavour of all food eaten out of doors. He had thought when he was a very small boy that tea in the garden tasted of the garden, of grass, and the sun and the smell of flowers and earth. He remembered tea in the rectory garden, and himself lying stretched out on a rug with a book, and a large, twisted bun with sugar on it. He remembered unwinding the twist of the bun until it was like a long sausage, and his fingers were so sticky that his father told him not to touch the book until he had been in to wash. He remembered, too, a picnic lunch eaten one Sunday on the top of Shotover. He had gone for a long walk with a friend at the beginning of the October term, and they had sat down in the shelter of a haystack looking across the valley towards Cumnor. The friend, a boy called Hardacre, and afterwards killed on the Somme, had told him that there was no higher ground between them and the Caucasus Mountains. He had not altogether believed him, but he had turned round to look when Hardacre pointed, feeling as though he were looking across Europe, and half expecting to see the faint outline of snow-topped peaks against the sky.

When he had finished his lunch, he lit another pipe and began to consider what he could do to earn a living. He was thirty-five, and trained for nothing but the Church. He might teach if he could remember enough of his classics. He had got a second in Mods., only just missing a

first, in the spring of 1914, but it was a long time ago—he had never kept it up beyond the necessary reading for ordination. Besides, a clergyman who had resigned his living and left the Church was not the most likely assistant to be chosen by the head master of a private school, for instance, to teach small boys. Nor was he the sort of person a father would choose for a tutor. He might get some private coaching, perhaps, or some sort of job in a library, or in an office, though he didn't know what he could do in an office. It wasn't going to be easy, he suspected, with so many people wanting jobs, and with his own private disqualifications. He must find something at once, so as to make a home as soon as possible for Joyce and the children. He hated the idea of the family being broken up. "I can surely find something that will bring in as much as this living," he thought, "and we can get a much smaller house, and Joyce won't have to bother with parish things like she has now, so perhaps it will be easier for her." He added to himself rather wistfully, "I expect we shall be very happy."

He rose and knocked out his pipe against the stones. His hands were cold, and he held the bowl between his two palms to warm them. He put the pipe back in his pocket and started to walk down the slope of the hill. He walked now without thinking very much, his mind soaked with air and light, and quieted by exercise. When he came again to the root of celandines, he bent down and picked all the flowers for Mary. They would have shut up by the time he gave them to her, but she could put them in water and they would open again in the morning. He had watched her ecstasy two days before when she found the

first daisy on the lawn. He picked the flowers with a confused idea of doing anything that he could to make up to her for the wrong he was doing her by breaking up her home. He fastened the little bunch together by twisting a long-stalked leaf round it, and walked on down the path.

He took the path which branched off into the narrow lane running behind the Grange. The high wall of the walled garden ran along one side of the lane. On the other was the usual dry wall of grey stone. He saw a woman coming along the lane towards him, and saw as she came nearer that it was Veronica Perfect.

She was bareheaded, the smooth curls of her hair a little ruffled out of their usual order. She wore a thick sweater of cherry-coloured wool, with a high collar that came close up under her chin. She carried an ash stick, swinging it carelessly from her hand.

When he saw her, he suddenly resolved to tell her what he had decided. He came towards her.

"Hullo!" she said. "I've had a friend to lunch, and she's only just gone, so I came out for a stroll. I don't think I shall ask her again. I don't like people who come to lunch on a fine day and stay till nearly tea-time. What have you been doing?"

"I've been for a walk, to think over things. I'm going to resign the living."

She said quickly: "Has there been any trouble about your marrying us? I saw it got into the papers. I was sorry. I hope it's nothing to do with that?"

"No, it's not that," he said. "I expect I should be forbidden to do that again—but that's only one small part of it. It's——"

"The Ship of Truth?" she interrupted.

"Yes, I can't go on taking money under false pretences."

"No, I don't think you could," she said quickly.

She laid a faint stress on the "you", but he did not notice it. He was grateful to her for seeing what he meant.

"So I shall have to look for another job."

"What would you like to do?"

"It isn't so much a case of liking; it must be anything I can get. It doesn't matter, so long as I can make a home for them."

She said, thinking, "It's a great upheaval, isn't it, and you'll be leaving Barnsdyke. Will Mrs. Dyson be sorry?"

"I don't know. I haven't talked it over with her yet."

He realized suddenly that he was telling some one else before Joyce. He was ashamed, as though he had wronged her. He said quickly:

"Nothing is really settled yet. We haven't had time to discuss it. Please don't say anything about it to any one."

"No," she answered, and he knew that she wouldn't.

"I'm sorry," she said slowly. "Sorry, I mean, about the difficulties and all the unpleasant part."

"Thank you." He broke out suddenly, "It isn't easy." She thought what a transparent face he had, so that you could almost see the eager thoughts behind it. "I feel like somebody turned adrift, but"—he smiled—"I expect we shall manage all right, and so long as they are happy, that's the great thing."

"Will you come in and have some tea?"

"No, thank you very much. I must get back, or Joyce will wonder where I am."

"Good-bye then, and good luck!"

"Thank you," he said again.

She watched him striding away down the narrow lane. She thought:

"I'm not sure that he isn't the most honest person I ever met. I expect it hurts him like hell—not believing—but I expect he believes more than he knows. Sometimes I think most people do. What will his wife think about it? She won't know what he's talking about. Poor girl, it will be awful for her; she'll hate it. I wonder if he'll find a job? I wonder if Rodney would mind if we had her and the two children to stay with us while he's looking for one? He would mind, of course, but I'm not sure I sha'n't ask them. I expect she wouldn't come if I did."

She turned in at the door of the walled garden and walked slowly through it towards the house.

XXII

Joyce came to the doorway of the vicarage.

"I'm so glad you're back, Clem. Father Caldicott is here. He came over by bus to see you, and he's been here three quarters of an hour. Did you have a nice walk?"

There was a good deal of relief in Joyce's tone. She had not found Father Caldicott very easy to entertain. He was much more at home with men than with women. He disapproved of clergymen's wives, he had no small talk, and he was not interested in young children. Even Mary found it difficult to sustain a conversation with him, though he tried to respond to her. She retired into a corner, and told herself a tale in a happy murmur. Michael cried and had

to be removed. Joyce poured out tea and struggled with the burden of the conversation.

When Clement came in, Caldicott rose, with almost visible relief.

"I should like to have a talk with you now, if you don't mind. I ought to catch the 5.30 bus back."

"Won't you have some more tea first?" suggested Joyce, who didn't see why Clement should be rushed off without his.

"No, thank you. I haven't time."

They went into the dining room. Clement laid the little bunch of limp celandines on the table and lit the gas fire. He pulled up a chair for his guest and sat down opposite to him.

"I saw the bishop the other day," Caldicott began. He paused, mastering with a real effort his inclination to tell Clement several of the bishop's shortcomings that had lately come to his notice. "He asked me to speak to you about the remarriage of Mrs. Marston."

"I suppose he disapproves," Clement said, but in a voice so vague and abstracted that Caldicott looked at him keenly, and spoke in a sterner tone:

"Of course. You must have known perfectly well that what you did was contrary to the principles of the Church, and that no churchman of any shade of opinion could uphold you."

"Yes, I did know."

Again Caldicott looked at him, puzzled by something almost like indifference in his manner. It struck him that the answers were mechanical, and that the real Clement Dyson had withdrawn from him to a distance, and was

beyond his reach. He studied his face carefully, and thought that he looked tired out, and yet more peaceful than when he had last seen him—less strained, less anxious. He tried to rouse him.

"You have deliberately given the sanction of the Church to a sinful relationship between two people."

Clement turned his head and looked at him.

"I ought to tell you that I am writing to the bishop to resign my living," he said gently.

"No, that is not necessary," Caldicott said at once. "The bishop does not wish you to do that. He only requires your assurance that this shall not happen again."

"It is nothing to do with the bishop or the remarriage. I am resigning it because I can no longer honestly administer the Sacraments, or teach or preach the Catholic Faith."

There was a silence. Clement stood with one arm on the mantelpiece, looking down at a broken burner in the gas fire. Caldicott stood up, walked across the room to the window, and came back to the fireplace. He said in a gentler voice:

"This is an experience that comes to every one of us. The Devil is with power. You have not lost your faith. It is only out of sight. You must do what we all have to do at these times, hold on, and it will come back to you. You must believe by your will, and trust in God for the rest."

Clement looked him in the eyes.

"I do not know that there is a God to trust in."

"There is," Caldicott answered. His deep voice rang with an unmistakable sincerity of conviction.

"You cannot prove it."

"I know it."

"How?"

"By my personal experience of Him."

"I thought so too, once—but—now I think that I deluded myself. We make God out of our own minds, each one of us, by our hunger and our need."

"And who made our minds—and the hunger and the need in them?"

"They are the result of centuries of evolution."

"From what?"

"I don't know, but I do not believe that this world is the creation of a perfect Being, just as I do not believe that the Church embodies the teachings of Christ."

"You do not allow for the Devil's handiwork."

"I do not believe in the Devil at all."

Caldicott threw out his hands with a strange, violent gesture.

"Who are you? What, after all, do you know or understand? Do you know where you came from, or where you are going, except so far as it has been revealed to you? Do you know how the flower grows out of the seed or the child in the womb? Can you expect, with your finite understanding, to grasp the infinite purposes of God? Will you set yourself up in judgment upon God, you who are no more than one of a million grains of sand?" Caldicott put a hand on the younger man's shoulder, and spoke with a sudden, surprising tenderness: "I know very well that you are passing through an hour of trial—but hold fast to the grace of God by the Sacraments of His Church, and you will not fail. You are like Christian going through the Slough of Despond—but you will come out on the other side."

"I can't do it," Clement answered. "I can't make myself believe or force beliefs on to myself. It isn't that I expect to understand, but my own feeling of the truth is the only thing I have to go by. It's the only thing any man can go by, it seems to me, and I can't teach others what I don't believe."

Caldicott walked back to the table and sat down.

"Will you at least wait a little before you write to the bishop? Will you take a holiday as I suggested, and give yourself a chance to recover your faith? If you can go nowhere else, will you change places with Legard for a month and come to St. Paul's, to the clergy house? You do not know how much of this is impatience and discouragement, and the mere want of a holiday. If you come to us, you can do as much or as little in the Church as you feel inclined. We can manage perfectly well."

Clement shook his head.

"Thank you very much, but I can't. I have thought it over and made up my mind. I can't go on being paid for work that I don't believe in."

Again there was a silence. Caldicott rose.

"I must go if I am to catch that bus."

Clement followed him out into the hall and picked up his coat.

"I am very grateful for your kindness," he said.

"Let me know if you change your mind. Thank you. Good night."

Caldicott walked away from the house along the ginnel, thinking what a pity it was. He, who was hard on bishops and hard on his parishioners, had an infinite fund of sympathy and compassion for parish priests, especially for the

younger ones. He knew so well their trials and their difficulties.

"A great pity," he thought sorrowfully. "A good man, a good Catholic, an excellent worker, but just a little too finely made—not quite tough enough to stand the inevitable strain, too introspective, and shut away in that place without any one of his own intellectual level to speak to. What will become of him? Rome? I've known it to be the end of that sort before, when they are tired of questioning. Well, better Rome than nothing," thought John Caldicott, who had a grim respect for the Roman Catholic Church, and prayed daily for a reunion which should be accomplished without any concessions on the part of his own Church. He climbed into the bus and settled himself in his own corner. As the bus jolted on its way, he sat with his stern gaze fixed, unseeing, on the faces before him, praying for the soul of Clement Dyson, as though he would wrest it by the force of his prayers from the Devil that Clement did not believe in.

XXIII

Joyce was sitting close to the lamp, sewing, when Clement came in from his study in the evening. She looked very comfortable, with her feet stretched out to the fire, and the light on her hair making the colours in it shine. She raised her face from her work and smiled.

"Have you finished, Clem? That's nice. Come and get warm, and we'll have a little peace. I haven't seen you all day."

It seemed hard to disturb that peace, but it must be done. He pulled up a chair to the fire, and sat down.

"I want to talk to you."

At his serious tone, she looked up quickly. Something dreadfully wrong in the parish—or something about money, some serious dilapidations that must be attended to at once? He saw the little pucker of anxiety on her forehead, and his heart smote him.

He said desperately:

"I don't know how to tell you. We shall have to leave here. Something has been happening to me lately—I can't go on."

"Clem, you're not ill?" She had noticed how much thinner and more lined he had got—she had a horrified vision of a secret, fatal disease, a doctor's verdict given today when he had said he was going to take a day off, walking.

"No, no, it's not that. It's that—I don't believe the same things."

"How do you mean?" She was puzzled. "You're sure you're not ill? You're not hiding it from me?"

"On my honour, I'm not. No, I'm quite all right, but I don't any longer believe in the Church's teaching, so I have written to-night to the bishop to resign my living."

Still she did not understand.

"Then where shall we go? Shall you get another one?"

"No. I can't go on with the ministry. It wouldn't be honest, when I don't hold the faith."

"Oh, Clem!" she cried, her eyes round with astonishment. "I don't understand! What do you believe?"

"I don't know. I don't think I believe in anything at all."

"But you must!" she cried. "You, Clem, you couldn't—you——"

She stopped short in sheer amazement. Clem, so good and religious, so much better and more religious than she was—it couldn't be true. He couldn't be an atheist—she didn't know such things happened to ordinary people. She looked around the room and tried to bring herself back to real things from things which must obviously be unreal. Then a new thought struck her.

"Oh, Clem, when shall we go—what shall we live on—the children?"

"I shall get a job—any job—as soon as I can. I'm afraid you'll have to go to your mother for a bit with Mary and Michael, until I can get something."

"But what will you get—and—what shall I tell Mother?—and no one will understand. Are you sure you don't believe?"

She began to cry suddenly and hopelessly. Clement knelt down on the floor and put his arms round her.

"Joyce, darling, don't. I'm so sorry. I know it's hard for you. Don't, darling. I wouldn't do it if I could help it, but I can't. I'll get a job, and we'll have a nice little house, much easier to look after than this one, and we'll all be awfully happy together—don't, darling, don't."

Her sobs grew quieter. She was a little comforted by the clasp of his arms. She had cried not only at the prospect of having no home, but because she was frightened by anything so far beyond her understanding. She knew that there were a lot of difficulties and disturbances in the Church, she read about them in the *Church Times*. She knew that she herself didn't always want to go to church,

and that she often hurried over her prayers when she was tired, and was often very unwilling to make the effort of preparation for Communion on Saturday evening, but all the same, she believed in everything the Church taught. She always had. Not only did she believe in it, but it was a great comfort to her. She always felt happier and better after Communion, or after going to church. She didn't trouble very much about the things people disagreed about, and she didn't think it would matter very much if they altered the Prayer Book, or if the services were rather different. Her feeling about these things, which she did not put into words, was that they were like a lot of the things men did, like business transactions and conversations about football. Women did not understand them, and they were not really very important.

She stroked Clement's hair.

"It's all right, dear. It was stupid of me to cry."

"You won't be very unhappy?" he said, still holding her.

"Oh, no, not as long as we're all together."

"We shall be as soon as ever I can manage it."

She was still stroking his hair. She looked into the fire over his head, and said doubtfully:

"Couldn't you talk to somebody about the things that are bothering you—Father Caldicott? Was that why he came to see you to-day?"

"Oh, no. He didn't know till I told him. He came about the Perfect marriage—the bishop sent him."

She stopped stroking his hair, and her body stiffened. She said in a hard, small voice:

"I knew there would be trouble if you married that woman."

He looked up at her, surprised.

"But that doesn't make any difference, Joyce. The bishop wasn't going to ask me to resign—and, anyhow, as I was going to resign, it wouldn't have mattered."

Her instincts sharpened her perceptions.

"Was all that thinking about the marriage one of the things that upset you about the Church?"

He answered thoughtfully:

"It wasn't the most important thing—that was in myself—but it was one of the things that helped me to see I couldn't go on."

She began to shake with anger. She said in the same hard voice:

"I wish she'd never come here. What business have people like that—silly, useless people—to go about the world making things hard for the others who've always tried to do their best and behave decently? She's not a nice woman. I wish she'd never come."

"Oh, Joyce, don't! There are so many different ways of behaving decently."

"Yes," Joyce agreed. "But running away from your husband with another man isn't one of them."

He said thoughtfully:

"I can imagine that it possibly might be."

Joyce answered firmly, "I don't see how it ever could."

Each looked at the other for a moment as though at a stranger never seen before.

"How soon shall we have to go?" Joyce asked.

"As soon as we can. I have asked the bishop to send some one at once to take charge of the parish. I sha'n't take any more services. We shall have to store all the fur-

niture. I thought perhaps Perfect would let us put it in some of the empty rooms at the Grange. There's a lot of the house they don't use—all those nurseries."

"I don't suppose they ever will use those," Joyce said sharply. "But I'd rather it didn't go there."

"All those storing places are terribly expensive, and there's only my sixty pounds till I make some for you and the children to live on."

"I don't care. I would rather starve than ask a favour of the Perfects."

Clement looked at Joyce in amazement. He had never known her like this before. Joyce herself knew that she was being unreasonable, but the shock had upset her. She wanted to fling herself down and cry. She wanted to be angry with somebody. She couldn't be angry with Clement, and her anger was transferred to Veronica Perfect, who seemed to her, in some obscure way, to be at the bottom of all their misfortunes.

"Let's go to bed and sleep on it," Clement said. "We can talk it over again in the morning."

Joyce gathered up her sewing and looked round the room before she turned out the lamp. She thought:

"This can't be real. It can't have happened to us, that we're going, that we sha'n't have a home, that Clement won't be a clergyman any longer. These things do happen, I know; they happen to other people, but not to us. It can't be real. I shall wake up in a minute and find I dreamed it."

She turned out the lamp and went out of the room. As she climbed the shallow oak stairs, she thought:

"I've often grumbled about this house, and hated it be-

cause it was so big and old and awkward to work. I know I shall often wish I was back in it—and Clem loves it so!"

She looked in at Mary, looked at Michael and covered him up, undressed and washed quickly, and slipped into bed. She could hear Clement in the next room, moving very quietly, so as not to disturb Mary. She thought:

"There may not be many more nights when I have them all round me, safe and well in our own house."

Her heart was weighed down by a dreadful feeling of insecurity. She turned over in bed and buried her face in her pillow to stifle her weeping.

XXIV

Clement went the next evening to the scouts' tea in the parish room. He had not celebrated that morning. He had put up a notice in the church porch to say that there would be no services that week, but as no one ever came to the weekday services, or looked at the notice board between Sundays, the announcement had made little stir in the parish. He wanted to go once again to the scouts' tea. He had always loved parish teas, from his early days in the rectory, when he and his small brother and sisters had regarded them as the most exquisite form of dissipation. He had liked them even in his most self-conscious days, when he was in the Sixth at school and in his first year at Oxford. He still liked them now, when it was his duty to go to them. He thought that of all the entertainments in the world, they had the most purely local flavour. Nowhere else did they make quite such a business of tea as in the West Riding of Yorkshire and in Lancashire.

The parish room was on the upper floor of the Old Tithe Barn. The walls had been plastered and painted red, but the floor had uncovered wooden boards, and there was no ceiling to hide the old wooden rafters and the heavy beams, black with age, that carried the roof. Tea had been going on for some time when Clement arrived. Not only the scouts were there, but their friends and relations, various officials of the scout organization, churchwardens, and anybody who could get in on any pretext for a free tea.

A place had been kept for Clement at the high table on the platform. He squeezed his way towards it between the trestle tables, answering greetings. He climbed at last to the high table, which was occupied by the scoutmaster and two patrol leaders, by Rodney Perfect, who was the local president, by two young girls in evening dress, by a small child of four, and by Mrs. Sykes, an enormously stout woman who kept a little shop, and who for some unknown reason, her bulk, or the loudness of her voice, or the sheer thrust of her powerful personality, was always at the high table at parish teas and in the front row at parish concerts, if not actually on the platform.

"That's right, loove, sit you down," she observed to Clement. His tea was produced and handed to him complete on a plate—half a pork-pie, a sausage, a round of buttered teacake and a cream bun. Rodney, who had finished and was smoking a pipe, nodded to him. He, too, the rich and spoilt frequenter of cities, was at home at these functions. He had attended them in his boyhood; they were natural to him—more natural than the dinners and dances, the London clubs, and foreign hotels. He was

neither surprised nor hurt when Mr. Booth, the vicar's warden, told him that he was getting fatter, nor when Mrs. Sykes pushed the sugar basin towards him with an "'elp yourself, loove—sweets to the sweet." He ate his plateful of tea, and talked about football to the scoutmaster, and chaffed the two girls in their crêpe de Chine frocks, who giggled incessantly throughout the meal.

Clement looked at the faces around him, red and shining from heat and tea. He heard on all sides of him the broad, racy speech, the quick retorts, the bursts of good-natured laughter. His heart went out to his people in a sudden tenderness and remorse. He felt as though he were deserting them, as though he had not been man enough to go on believing what they could all believe in one way or another, obstinately, carelessly, by custom, by instinct. He was deserting them. He might be leaving them to some stranger, some foreigner from the South who would not understand them, who would take offence at their frankness and familiarity, who might not even know who played cricket for Yorkshire, although, Clement reflected, he would soon learn, unless he were deaf or inattentive. Then came into Clement's mind an old story of his father's, of a man leaning against the wall outside the public-house door in a Yorkshire village on a Saturday night, and saying, in tones of drunken content, "I've been to Africa, and I've been to 'Merica, and I've been to 'Stralia, but what I say is, 'Give me 'ere.' " Clement smiled as he remembered the story, but the words seemed good to him, and his heart echoed them.

Tea was over. The tables were cleared, the trestles stacked against the wall, and the chairs arranged for the

evening's entertainment. The scoutmaster, a clerk from Akeroyd's mill, climbed on to the small platform. He was a pale young man, whose eyes protruded slightly behind gold-rimmed spectacles. He was a very ardent believer in the scout movement, a hard worker, and a poor disciplinarian. This was his hour. He looked round the room at his attentive audience.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I am now going to give you an 'umerous recitation."

"Just as well to know," Rodney murmured.

The recitation, heard several times before, moved the audience to moderate laughter and polite applause. The scoutmaster accepted the applause, bowing gravely, his spectacles shining in the light.

"Now I'll give you another one. This is in the Irish dialect," he added impressively.

Rodney moved his chair nearer to Clement's.

"How many does he know?" he whispered.

"I've heard him do half a dozen."

"Good Lord! Got a nerve, hasn't he?"

This time the applause was more perfunctory.

"Here's another humorous one," the scoutmaster said in a hurry.

"Eh, lad, let some one else have a turn!" Mrs. Sykes shouted across the room.

"Hear, hear!" Rodney murmured under his breath. "We must have this one, though, we don't want to discourage talent. Shut up, you beggars." He aimed a gentle kick at two small scouts, who were scuffling noisily on the floor.

"I'll just give you this one more," the scoutmaster said

in rather pleading tones. He didn't wish to put himself forward, but he meant to stand up for his rights. This was the scouts' tea, and he was the scoutmaster, and if he couldn't give recitations at the scouts' tea, who could? From behind his shining spectacles, he gauged the temper of his audience. He had better make this the last, perhaps. In that case, not a humorous one—something dramatic. He announced:

"This is entitled 'The Lovers' Burial.'"

"Doesn't sound very humorous," Rodney murmured doubtfully.

"This one isn't meant to be," Clement said hastily. Like the rest of the audience, he knew the repertoire, and had heard the piece several times before.

"It was a dark winter's night, and snow lay thick upon the ground . . ."

Clement's mind wandered away from the lovers' burial. He couldn't imagine what it would be like, not to belong to a parish, not to be attached to a parish as he always had been, except for the brief interval of the war, and even then he had gone home on leave to his father's parish, he had been prayed for by the parish, had had letters and messages and parcels from people in the parish, had had a man out of the parish in his own company, and had talked over home news with him. He had sometimes thought that the parochial system of the Church of England was a mistake, and yet it was a sturdy thing of natural growth. He was not sure that the countless parochial organizations did not obscure the sacramental religion; suddenly he realized that he was thinking as though he still believed and still belonged to the ministry. There returned to him with

a shock his sense of loneliness and loss. He felt himself set apart from these people, alone with his own disaster.

He did not pay much attention to the turn which followed—a song by one of the giggling girls in evening dress, accompanied by the other. They were the daughters of the organist. They could not play or sing, but if they were not allowed to demonstrate this on every public occasion, their father would send word that he was ill on Sunday when it was too late to get any one else to play the organ. All the audience knew this, and submitted patiently. Any lack of warmth in their applause was covered by the enthusiasm of the girls' relations.

Clement was roused by a general movement all over the room, as though the real business of the evening were beginning. They were clamouring for a sing song, and he went to the piano. Sooner or later in the evening, they were certain to want to sing for themselves, however many people were there to sing for them. It was a healthy instinct in a race that did not always work for themselves when they could get the dole, and seldom now played games for themselves, preferring to bet on those who were paid to play for them. Clement sat down at the piano.

"What will you have first?"

From the babel of sounds, he distinguished the preponderating vote with the skill born of long practice.

" 'Green grow the rushes?' All right."

He began to play. At once the chorus of voices rose up around and behind him.

"What is your one, oh? Green grow the rushes, oh!
My one is one and all alone and evermore shall be, oh!

"What is your two, oh?
Green grow the rushes, oh! . . ."

The Yorkshire voices, full-toned, surged up to the rafters in rising waves of sound. The song belonged to the days when the land of chimneys and mills and trains was still a green country—"England's pleasant pastures green", he thought again as he played, and it seemed to him that the sturdy chorus of sound had something of the freshness of the unspoilt countryside. After all, it was English earth under the mills and workshops, English earth, warm and living, down below the bricks and steel, and the "pleasant pastures green" must be hidden deep in the blood and nerves of this begrimed and stunted race whose mothers breathed the smoke of chimneys all the months before they bore them.

"What is your twelve, oh?
Green grow the rushes, oh!
My twelve's the twelve Apostles crowned, and ever more shall be, oh!"

The song came to an end, the company applauding themselves far more heartily than they had applauded any individual performer.

"What will you have now?"

There was a shout for "London's burning." Some one rose up from among the chairs and divided the company into three blocks. Even the small boys at the back came to join in. They loved the crash of sound on the short, sharp lines.

Clement opened the top of the piano. As he struck the first chord, the first block of singers came in like a volley:

"London's burning! London's burning!"

He heard the second block follow them with the line, as their voices rose on the next:

"Fire, fire! Fire, fire!"

The third division, hardly restrained, stormed joyfully in with "London's burning", almost drowning the leaders' "Go quickly! Fetch water!" Clement was making all the noise he could with the piano. Mrs. Sykes came across the room to him and obligingly beat time on his back, encouraging him to further efforts. Again and again his hands crashed on the chords, he heard the chorus shouted behind him, till the room with its red walls seemed to reel with the sound:

"London's burning! London's burning!
Fire, fire! Fire, fire!
Go quickly! Fetch water!"

XXV

Clement stood by the ticket barrier with Michael in his arms and watched the familiar pieces of luggage lifted on to a trolley. He counted them—Joyce's trunk, new for their honeymoon; the old trunk that held the children's clothes; the tin bath with the leather strap that they had bought two years ago when they first took Mary away to the sea; the perambulator; the holdall into which he had always stuffed odds and ends at the last minute; the fold-up cot, a present from Joyce's mother to Michael. Already they looked to him alien and strange, as though they disowned him, and knew that he had wilfully separated himself from them.

"All right, old boy, Mother's coming," he encouraged

Michael, who did not like the dark station, and was just not crying.

He saw Joyce making her way towards him through the crowd, leading Mary, and carrying her handbag and Mary's mackintosh. She was flushed with heat and fatigue. She smiled at him unsteadily.

"The things are all here," he said. "You won't have to change—I've asked. There's a through carriage on, and it will be this end. We may as well go on, now, I think. The train's signalled."

They went through the barrier on to the platform.

"Going to Grannie's," Mary said, in the little cheerful voice that always reminded Clement of a young bird.

"You'll come home to us, Clem, if you don't have any luck at first? You know Mother would be glad to have you."

"Home" for Joyce had again become the house in Liverpool where her mother lived, since it was the only home now left her.

"Oh, I shall find something," he answered cheerfully. "Most certainly," he thought, "he wasn't going to land himself on her people. It was bad enough having to send her back with the children."

"Oh, yes, I am sure you will."

They stood together in silence, watching the luggage wheeled up the platform.

"I hope baby will sleep in the train."

"Oh, I think he will. He's getting drowsy now."

There was another silence. Mary exchanged smiles with all the strangers near enough, and skipped up and down, holding her mother's hand.

"You'll get something to eat, Clem, before your train goes?"

"Oh, yes, I'll go and get some tea as soon as you've gone. Here's the train."

"Look, Mary, here's the train coming to take you to Grannie's. Look at him puffing away right out there at the end! What is he saying?"

Mary smiled joyfully at a recognized cue. "He's saying, 'I'll huff and I'll puff, and I'll blow your house down.' "

Joyce felt as though the noise of the train coming in were breaking something in her. She felt an entire hatred of the train which had come punctually at the appointed minute to take her away.

"Let me have Michael while you see the luggage in."

"No, he's all right. There's plenty of time. I'll find your places first, and then go and look after it."

Clement walked down the third-class carriages, and found one with only one cheerful-looking woman in a corner, who looked as though she would not be too much annoyed by the arrival of Mary and Michael. Joyce got in, and took Michael on her knee. He lifted Mary in and settled her next to the window. He put their small luggage in the rack.

Mary rubbed a finger along the window sill, and held it out for inspection.

"Ough! Dirty!" she said gravely.

"Yes, darling; don't rub your hands on it."

"I'll just see about the luggage."

Clement disappeared. Joyce sat very still, holding Michael in her lap. She mustn't cry, mustn't upset the

children, mustn't let Clem see how miserable she was.

His head appeared again at the window. "It's in the van behind."

"All right, thank you, dear. I expect Dad will meet us."

"Here's a paper, and one for Mary."

He handed in a magazine and a children's paper. She knew it was extravagant of him, but she wasn't going to reproach him now.

"Oh, thank you. Look, Mary! You'll write at once, Clem, and let me know your address and how you are getting on."

"Yes, rather!"

"Don't worry about us—Mother loves having the children—and the change will do us all good."

To herself she said, "Oh, God, don't let me cry!" Then, aloud, "Oh, Mary, what a lovely picture!"

"Yes," said Mary, with great satisfaction. "A bad, black puss-cat been put in the corner!"

"I wonder what it's done, don't you?"

"I know what it's done. It wouldn't eat its good bread and milk. It didn't like it," added Mary with sympathy.

"Don't you worry about me, Joyce. I'm sure to find something—and I know one or two places where I can stay."

"Oh, yes, I daresay the change will do you good, too. It ought to be getting warmer in the South now."

"Yes, London is lovely in the spring—you're just off now."

"Good-bye, dear. Take care of yourself."

Mary looked up from the paper.

"Daddy coming too?"

"Not just yet—soon. Give my love to your mother and father. Good-bye, dear."

"Good-bye. Baby, wave good-bye to Daddy! Good-bye, Daddy!"

"Good-bye!"

Clement watched the train sliding out of the station. He walked away down the platform, feeling cold, and very much alone. Everything that was left to him, everything warm and friendly and familiar, seemed to have slipped out of his life with the sliding train. He went into the station restaurant and ordered two buns and a cup of tea. He had always hated meals in a station, and he suddenly couldn't bear the way the pale, milky tea slopped over the edge of the cup into the saucer when it was handed to him. He finished the buns and went to book his ticket. He took his seat in a corner of the London train.

PART TWO

"NO LIGHT, NO MARK"

I

Veronica Perfect was walking down New Bond Street on a May morning. She stopped here and there to look in a shop window at an enamelled snuffbox, a piece of lace, or a cut-glass bowl. The sun shone, a little breeze crept down the street. Veronica saw in a mirror a reflection of herself, dainty and debonair, in her dark blue frock, and in a grotesque little hat that suited her. She derived a frank pleasure from the reflection.

"I think I'll go to Coralie now about that frock," she thought. "Then I'll have lunch, and then I'll do the shopping." She walked on a little farther and remembered, "It's Wednesday—damn, I forgot! I sha'n't be able to get those special biscuits of Rodney's. The place shuts, I know. Well, I'll do that now and go to Coralie after lunch."

She walked on more quickly into Oxford Street to a little French shop, where she bought the biscuits and some marrons glacés.

"I love being alone in London," she thought, as she came out into the roar of Oxford Street. "It's such fun. It's like being invisible, somehow. There's so much going on, and none of it stops to bother about you."

She went into one of the big shops, and was carried up in the lift to the restaurant on the top floor. She sat down at a little table and considered the menu with interest. She

was hungry. She ordered her lunch and sat looking round her at the other people. There was a large counter of chocolates and fancy sweets at the end of the room. Presently she got up and strolled over to look at them. She looked at the shapes and colours of them, at the boxes with their pictures of Venetian ladies, and poudré cavaliers and masked revellers, at the ribbon and tinfoil and gold string.

"How beautiful they do make them now!" she thought. "What fun to do it—to think of things for them. I wonder who thought of making those raised-up velvet pansies on that box, or of shaping those fondants like flowers. I wonder if they were very pleased when they thought of it, or if they were sorry to think that the sweets would be eaten and the box thrown in the waste-paper basket. No, I expect they enjoyed making them, and went on to think what they would make next. And there must be thousands of people doing that! Every one says it is so awful that life is getting so complicated, but I think it is lovely and surprising. I feel grateful to life for bothering to be so various."

She bought a round box of crystallized fruits, and went back to her table. The waitress brought her omelette and coffee. She smiled at the waitress, who was a cheerful girl and smiled back at her, remarking that it was a nice day.

"Very nice," Veronica agreed. "I wonder if I should think so if I was a waitress," she thought, when the girl had gone. "I've never done what they call an honest day's work. That doesn't seem fair when you come to think of it. I'm what they call the idle rich. I'm not honestly sorry.

I like being rich and I like being idle. Still, I can see that it's not fair. I'm not contributing. I can't do any public works and that sort of thing, because I'm not sure about them. I think they are mostly minding other people's business—not that the people doing them don't really think they ought, so it's all right for them—but I don't know. Perhaps that's just my damned idleness. Suppose I have a baby; that would be contributing. Should I like to have one? Rodney would. I don't feel very strongly about it. Perhaps I haven't got any maternal instincts. They always say those come with the baby. Certainly I can't imagine having a baby and not liking it. One does naturally like the people one lives with, unless there's some special reason, or unless something goes very wrong." She thought of Claud, and for a moment a shadow came across the day's brightness. "I shouldn't have hated Claud if I hadn't been married to him. When you are as near to a person as you are in marriage, loving is terribly near hating." She lit a cigarette, and blew a smoke ring thoughtfully, watching the blue circle widen and fade and vanish. "But if I do have a baby, I sha'n't love it anything like I love Rodney. Some women do. Some women love the children more than the husband, but I shouldn't, and I shouldn't want Rodney to. All the same, I expect I shall have one. I think I'd like a girl. Rodney would like a boy. Whichever it is, I'll try to give it a fair show."

She finished her cigarette, paid her bill, and went down again in the lift, bound for the important business of Coralie and the dress.

At half-past three she was walking through Hyde Park on her way home to the flat. She looked at the brilliant

flower beds, and at the young green of the trees, still fresh and unspoilt.

"London is lovely in the spring," she thought. "I'm glad we are going to be here more. I quite like Barnsdyke, but I haven't yet got to believe in it when I'm not there. It's because it's not like anything I've known. It's like country and town all mixed up together, and neither quite country nor quite town. When I think of it, I see it in my mind all grey, but not a dead greyness. There's a kind of power in it, and there are fires too. Fires in houses and great fires in furnaces and forges. It doesn't seem very probable here. It's not the sort of place that anybody knows or goes to, but there's something to it; it could get hold of you."

She glanced at a man walking towards her along the path and saw that it was Clement Dyson.

At the first glance, although she knew that she knew him, she did not recognize him. It was the first time she had seen him out of clerical dress. He hesitated, stopped, then smiled, and came towards her. They shook hands.

"How are you?" she said. "It's funny, I was just thinking about Barnsdyke."

"Were you?" he said, smiling. "I was too. I was thinking about that evening we dined with you, and the poem I found."

She nodded. "Yes, I remember. 'Isolt came from the sea inland.' I read it again afterwards. What are you doing now, at this moment, I mean? Are you going anywhere?"

"No, only strolling about."

"Stroll back with me to the flat and have tea with us. We've got a little tiny flat in a block off the Brompton

Road. Rodney has to be in town a good deal now, on business—the partner died, you know—and he hates living in hotels, and I like London, so we took this. When we want to go home, we just lock it up and leave it. Come and have a look at it. It's rather nice."

"Thank you, I should like to." He turned and walked by her side.

"Are you all in town now?"

"No," he answered. "Joyce and the children are with her mother. I'm working in a shop—a bookshop. That's why I'm here this afternoon. We shut on Wednesdays."

"A bookshop sounds as though it might be rather fun."

"Yes, I quite like it, but I'm afraid it's only temporary. The man who had my job is away ill; he got a recommendation to a convalescent home for three months, but the old man the shop belongs to—Fellows, his name is—promised to keep the job open for him, and of course I shall have to go when the other man comes back, which I expect will be about the middle or end of June. Anyhow, it's not very well paid; it's a small shop and I don't get enough to keep a home on, not any sort of home where I could keep Joyce and the children."

"No, I see. I expect it's very difficult to get a good job."

"It is for me. You see, I can't get any sort of schoolmastering or tutoring, because nobody quite likes to take on an ex-parson for those sort of jobs. There's a feeling that there must be something odd about me—and, of course, they can't be quite sure whether I resigned or was given the push—and they don't want the minds of the young unsettled."

He spoke cheerfully, but she heard the weariness in his voice.

"I quite see their point of view," he said, a minute later. "Before, if I was choosing or helping to choose a village schoolmaster, for instance, I should have wanted to get a man with orthodox views and opinions."

"Sometimes I hate orthodox views and opinions."

"I don't—I wish I had them."

The weariness was patent, and she thought she heard a faint sigh. She glanced at him quickly as she walked beside him. She thought that in some odd way he looked more like a clergyman in ordinary clothes than he did in clerical dress.

"It's his eyes," she thought. "They aren't like other people's. They're so innocent. You didn't notice it so much before, because they seemed to belong, but now they make you look at them. I didn't know before how nice looking he was. Not exactly nice looking, but—it's the sort of face a crusader might have, or one of those people who sailed on the *Mayflower*. The sort of face that's looking on ahead, looking for something. You can tell directly you look at him that he couldn't be mean or unkind. How silly these people are who won't give him jobs because of his opinions. Opinions don't matter half as much as everybody thinks. There's a kind of person that is religious whether he thinks he believes anything or not."

She looked at him again, and thought:

"He looks ill. I wonder where he's living—and how. I wonder if Rodney could scrape up a job for him in the dye works. I'll ask him."

"Do you get much time to read the books?" she asked.

"Oh, yes, and Fellows is very kind—he lets me take anything back to my rooms. I've read a lot lately—more than I ever read in my life before."

"Have you discovered any more perfect poems?"

"I haven't been reading poetry much. I've been reading scientific books a lot—and philosophy and some theology —trying to find out——"

"Still the Ship of Truth?" she said lightly.

"Yes, but I haven't a ship," he added suddenly, in a queer bitter tone. "I'm drowning."

She shook her head.

"Oh, no, I don't think so." But she was very sorry for him. Awful, it must be, to worry about things like that. Awful, and it was so often the nicest people who did, the people who were kind, who understood quickly what you meant when you were talking. Suddenly she wanted to tell him the things she had been thinking about at lunch. She said:

"Isn't life various? Isn't there a lot of it?" and then stopped and laughed.

"Yes," he said, smiling. "It's immense. It's like a great flood carrying everything along with it. What made you think of it then?"

"The different kinds of chocolate boxes I saw at the place where I had lunch."

He nodded.

"I know—or flowers make you think of it, or people's faces—all the people you see every day, and never two faces quite alike."

"What sort of people come into your bookshop?"

"Mostly people who know something about books. It's a second-hand shop, you see; at least we do have some new books, but most of our business is second-hand, and as a rule people come because they want one particular book, or else because they like books and want to look round. We don't have many of the 'want a nice book for a birthday present' kind."

"Mostly quite interesting people, then?"

"Oh, yes, and nice to deal with, but not generally with much money to spend—so we don't make much." He added, "I like taking the money—you know, I get quite keen towards the end of the day. I add up in my mind how much I've taken and try to make it up to so much more. I watch people reading the books, and when I think it's a good moment, I go up and try to sell them something—very carefully and gently. It's rather like catching insects—you must never scare people in a bookshop, you must let them settle."

She laughed. "I think I'll come to your bookshop one morning. Will you let me settle?"

"Of course. I hope you'll settle on a first edition. We have a few quite good ones."

They had turned off the Brompton Road, and she stopped at the doorway of a tall house.

"Here we are. Will you ring the bell for the lift? We can't toil all the way up the stairs. Rodney does it sometimes for his figure, but we don't either of us need to get thinner."

II

Clement sat in the deep cushioned window seat, and looked down on the heads of the people walking in the road below him. The tea tray was ready on a small table. Veronica went to a cupboard in the corner and put strawberry jam in a shallow glass dish, and chocolate biscuits on a plate of old blue china.

"I have a maid who comes in every day, but this is her afternoon off. Her young man's in a butcher's shop somewhere near Kensington High Street, so she meets him and they go to the pictures. I won't be a minute; the kettle's nearly boiling. Could you open that tin, do you think? We shall want some shortbread. Rodney will be in soon. He has a theory that he doesn't eat tea, but it's only a theory. It makes him feel thinner while he's eating it."

She picked up the teapot and went through into the tiny kitchen. Clement, manipulating the tin, thought how pretty the room was. He liked the pale yellow walls, and the two big vases of tall yellow tulips. He liked the delicate china and bright silver and fine embroidered mats on the tea table. He had lunched off a poached egg at an A.B.C. shop, and he realized suddenly that he was hungry and wanted tea. It was a long time since he had had a meal in anything like a home. He felt homesick for Joyce, and for the low dark room at the vicarage with the shabby, comfortable furniture, and the windows open to the garden.

Veronica come back with the teapot and a plate of bread and butter.

"Now, let's begin. Pull up that little table and be comfortable. Where are you living now?"

"I've got a room in a house at Bethnal Green."

"I don't know it, but it sounds dreadful."

"It isn't so bad. There's a real green, you know, rather like a park with flower borders and so on, and I'm only five minutes' walk from it. It's an old house. It's been a good house once, I suppose, when Bethnal Green was a fashionable quarter."

"But the bookshop isn't there?"

"No, it's in a little side street off Ludgate Hill."

"Oh, I know Ludgate Hill," she nodded, pleased that he was coming within her ambit. "Have some jam? What do you do in your spare time—in the evenings and on Sundays?"

"Mostly read or walk, and on Sunday mornings——" He hesitated.

"Yes?" she said gently. It occurred to her that he must feel especially lost and homesick on Sunday mornings.

"It sounds rather absurd, but I go to all sorts of different churches—I don't mean English churches only—any kind. Last Sunday I went to a Christian Scientist place; the Sunday before I went to a Baptist chapel; the week before that I went to Mass at an R.C. church. I wanted to see what they all were, what there is in them. I keep hoping that somewhere, sometime——"

"You would find something you want?"

"Yes."

"But you haven't yet?"

"No. They all seem to me like something imposed by

men upon their fellow men, made first as a shield against life and then turned into a kind of yoke, an oppression."

"Are you sure," she said slowly, "that what you want is only to be found in churches?"

He looked up with that peculiar, intent look she had noticed before, when he was absorbing a new idea.

"I'm not sure it's to be found anywhere—but I think a church is the most likely place to find it."

"I expect it is for some people, but not everybody. I think, if, as you say, it's to be found anywhere—and I think it is—it might be found in the country, or in the streets, or in a book, or in a symphony, or inside yourself, or in another person."

"I suppose it might." He was considering. "It is so difficult to look at things as they are, because it's so difficult to clear away all the ideas you've absorbed as you grow up—little bits of other people's ideas, phrases and catchwords that aren't your own, but you've come to feel as if they were. It's awfully difficult for any grown-up person to look at things for the first time, and without prejudice."

She nodded. "I sometimes think it is because we have got into the way of looking at things too much in blocks. People, especially, ought always to be looked at separately. There are always articles in the papers saying, 'Women like this, that, and the other', or 'The modern young man does so and so', or 'The clergy do not hold——' That annoys me; it's silly. It's like writing, 'All greengrocers are fond of playing mah jong.' I think it's much better to consider each person and thing by themselves, only, of course, it's much more trouble. It means a lot more thinking, and I suppose that's why we don't do it."

"Don't you like thinking?" he said, smiling. She laughed and answered:

"Yes, and talking still more. Can't you see I do?"

The door opened and Rodney appeared, carrying a sheaf of pink carnations loosely wrapped in paper.

"Hullo!" he said. "I walked all the way up. I'm exhausted." He looked at the stranger, who sat with his back to the window. He looked again. "Why, hulloa, Dyson, I didn't see it was you! Nice of you to look us up. Here, Nicky, I brought you these. Is there any tea left? I'd like a cup if there is, just to be sociable."

III

Veronica came into the little dining room and inspected the table, which was laid for four. The pink carnations were in the middle in a silver bowl.

"It all looks very nice, I think," Veronica remarked. "I'm rather proud of this flat. I think I'm a good housekeeper."

Rodney was mixing cocktails at the sideboard.

"Yes, you are. I don't know how you do it, but you've made the place look exactly like you, somehow. I think I could tell it was yours if I came into it without knowing."

Veronica was interested.

"Stamped my personality on it, have I, Rodney?"

"Yes," said Rodney, "or given it a flavour—like mushrooms in a stew. I'll take these through into the other room."

He carried the tray into the sitting room and put it down on a table.

"Did the ex-vicar eat all my biscuits?"

"No, not quite." She sat down on the window seat. "I am sorry for him."

"You're always being sorry for somebody," Rodney said, laughing. He looked across at her. She was wearing a slim, silver dress that fitted her body closely to the hips, and then branched out into skirts of silver lace. She had two or three pink carnations pinned on her shoulder. "Topping!" he thought. Aloud he said, "Be a little sorry for me for a change."

"You—what should I be sorry for you about?"

"Ah!" Rodney said sagely. "You can always find something to be sorry for any one about if you try."

"I expect that's true."

He looked at her again. "Well, don't go and be serious about it. Come here and let's drink up the two best cocktails before they come. We'll say we wanted to make sure they were all right."

Veronica came across to him.

"I love having people to dinner; it's so nice when they go."

"Yes, isn't it—and before they come."

She laughed.

"We are a nice pair, aren't we?"

"Well, I think we are rather a nice pair—half of us, anyhow." He touched her smooth shoulder lightly.

She picked up a packet of cigarettes and began to empty it into the cigarette box.

"I suppose you couldn't find a job for the ex-vicar in the dye works?"

"No. Quite definitely, no."

"Couldn't you invent one?"

"I could, but I won't. I don't believe in manufacturing jobs, nor in giving jobs to people who can't do them."

"Couldn't he do one?"

"Of course he couldn't! He knows nothing about it, and he's too old to learn. If I found him a job it would only be some rotten little clerk's job, and he couldn't keep his family on it, and he'd be miserable, and expect favoured nation treatment, and he wouldn't get it."

"I don't believe he would be as bad as all that. He'd try, I think."

"Not in my works he won't try, anyway. He won't have the chance."

"His bookshop job finishes in June."

"Poor devil, I'm sorry for him. I'll lend him a fiver any day, but I'm not going to saddle myself with him for life."

"You know, I feel partly responsible, because of him marrying us."

"That was all right," Rodney said quickly. "I mean—it wasn't that. He didn't get the sack for it. I know, because I asked him at Barnsdyke the first time I met him after I heard he was going away. He said that it wasn't that at all; he threw in his hand himself. Couldn't go on in a false position, he said. I grant you, if he'd got the sack on our account, I'd have had to find him something, but he didn't, you see—thank heaven. So don't you worry about him. His conscience isn't our affair. I think he's a crotchety fellow, you know. I should think he made difficulties for himself, and probably worried himself to death over trifles. And, anyway, I don't want him in the

dye works," Rodney concluded firmly. "Here are the Burnands; I'll go and let them in."

IV

Clement left the flat with a lighter heart than he had carried for some weeks. To meet a friend in his present solitary existence was no small gain to one naturally gregarious, and at no time in greater need of sympathy. In his letters to Joyce he avoided all reference to any but his obvious trouble, the difficulty of finding a permanent job. Even on that he touched lightly, writing more hopefully than he felt. It was not fair to distress her. He was sensitively aware of the whole thing as unfair to her, unfair that she should suffer for his conscience. It seemed to him a part of all the unfair and vicarious suffering in the world to which his eyes were newly opened, now that he no longer accepted the universe without question as the handiwork of God. A damned, unfair, chaotic business. Children were hampered from the start by their inheritance from their parents, by their surroundings, by circumstances. They were involved in a web of miseries and disasters before they could walk. Grown men and women were hampered by the developments of those miseries and disasters, by the limitations of their natures and circumstances, by the consequences of actions in which they had had no part. The whole world toiled and groaned under a crushing weight of things that could not be remedied.

Clement walked along the Brompton Road in the cool air of the May evening. He looked at the faces of those who passed him, and though some were smiling and oth-

ers talking, there was hardly a face, even a young one, that did not bear some mark of strain or anxiety.

"We are all living under a weight," he thought. "All pressed down by it, so that we can't lift up our heads in the daylight. It is because we are all governed by fear. Fear, not God, is the primary motive of the universe. It used to take simple and straightforward shapes, the primitive fears of death, of pain, of the dark, of some one bigger and better armed than you were coming along and taking away your wife and your beasts and your home. Now it's a thousand times more complicated. There are those same fears of violence and disease and starvation, only muffled by civilization, and there are a thousand fears of what people will think, or say, or do, if we do what we want to do. And there's the fear of doing wrong.

"That's a big fear, the fear of doing wrong. It's at the bottom of all the religions in the world. It's at the bottom of all the ethics and morality. In the early days before tribal law, men took other men's wives and dinners—then there was murder and chaos, and because they were afraid, they made standards of right and wrong. They made gods, and when they went against those standards, they said that the gods were angry and would punish them. It was really that they were afraid of the consequences. They remembered them in their bones. Then when it came to the Jews, because their fear was stronger than other men's fear, they made a sterner religion, a more awful God, but it was fear—fear all the time."

He was walking down Piccadilly now, quite unaware of the clamour and stir around him.

"Yes," he thought. "I don't wonder we're a hag-ridden

world. Fear is a cruel master. I've been afraid, often, as a small boy, afraid of the dark, afraid of my first term at school, and afraid of dying, afraid of eternity. I was afraid in France in the war—but then religion helped me." And suddenly he thought, "If I'm afraid now, there's nothing to help—only myself. I'm not afraid just at the moment, but fear is always beyond, always waiting. If things get any worse; if I can't get a job at the end of this one; if anything went wrong with Joyce or the children, or if I was ill or going to die; there's nothing now."

He began to cross over the road. He stood with some other people on an island in the middle and saw the traffic sweep past him, almost touching him, in an apparently endless stream, noisy, restless, unceasing. He thought:

"It's like this. It's as though I were standing on an island—safe, but only just safe. If I took a step off either way, I should be borne down and killed. The traffic would sweep over me."

At Piccadilly Circus, he got on to a bus that carried him eastwards towards the City. To be lifted up above the streets brought him a temporary sense of detachment, a lessening of the acute agony of his mind, as though he stood a little farther off from the perils of humanity.

"What about Christ?" he thought. "Was fear His primary motive? No, it wasn't. He was afraid. He had the ordinary human fear of dying, but other things were stronger in Him. It's that that has made Christianity so much more powerful and attractive than other religions. There's love in it, and love is the only thing which can be as strong as fear, even for a little." Suddenly a bitter pang of loneliness swept through him. "Why can't I believe?

Why can't I believe in Christ and in His teaching, and let the rest go? I can believe in His teaching, but not that He was the Son of God, and rose from the dead. There is no God and no resurrection—I can admire Christ and follow Him, but I cannot speak to Him nor pray to Him. He does not now exist. The life-force that went through Him has gone on long ago to fill the brains and hearts of other men, and His body is the leaves in a garden in Palestine."

The bus rolled on through the Haymarket, past Ludgate Hill, out towards Bethnal Green. Clement got down and walked across the park towards his lodging. The house was in a dingy street of what had once been good houses. Now, with their paint rotted off, their railings broken, their doorsteps covered with quarrelling children, they looked indescribably dreary and forlorn, as though sunk in the apathy of their fallen fortunes. Clement went into the house where he lodged and upstairs to his room.

Clement got out his block and pen and began to write to Joyce, sitting at the rickety bamboo table by the open window.

My Dearest, he wrote,

I was so glad to have your cheerful letter this morning with all the news of you and the children. Please thank Mary for the picture—of course I knew what it was meant to be.

He paused, and looked up smiling. He could see Mary sitting at a table, holding the pencil firmly and very near the point, following it round in her excitement with the tip of her tongue. He hoped she wouldn't have grown too different before he saw her again. He hoped he wouldn't

have grown out of touch with her. He had always been able to follow her fancies. She had never suggested before that Daddy wouldn't know what it was she was drawing. He felt as though she had unconsciously begun to make a stranger of him. He sighed and resumed:

We were not busy in the bookshop this morning, so I had a long talk with old Fellows. I think from what he says that Darby may be back before long, and that means good-bye—but don't you worry, something else will turn up—something more permanent, I hope. I call in at the agencies every week, and I answered three or four advertisements yesterday. I had an answer from the school in Norfolk, and also one from the people in Scotland, but nothing doing in either case, I am afraid.

He paused again, and looked thoughtfully at the paper. Not very cheering for Joyce, this constant record of failures, and it was really all the news he had for her. He pictured her sitting with her father and mother in the house in the suburb of Liverpool, reading her letter in the evening while her mother dozed, and her father read his paper, perhaps looking up to ask, "Has Clement found anything yet?" He could imagine her meeting people she knew, girls she had gone to school with, people whose houses she had gone to before she was married . . . could imagine them saying, "Oh, are you still with your mother? How long are you staying?" It wouldn't be a cheering existence for her. He took up the pen again, and wrote resolutely:

I walked through Hyde Park this afternoon, the trees were glorious—and he remembered—why, of course, he

had something cheerful to tell her! I had an unexpected bit of luck—he wrote.—I met Mrs. Perfect. They have a little flat now off the Brompton Road, and she took me back there to tea with her. It is the prettiest little place, I wish you could see it—all yellow walls and yellow flowers. I never saw a place that seemed so full of sunshine. Just the sort of little place that would do for us if we could manage one, and I should think it would be easy to run. Mrs. Perfect made tea herself in a little sort of kitchen opening off the sitting room. Perfect came in before I left, and they were both very kind, and asked after you and the children, and wanted to be remembered to you. It was an unexpected pleasure to see a home face, and I felt very much cheered up. They have kindly asked me to go round there to tea any Wednesday. Mrs. Perfect is always in then at tea time, as it is the maid's afternoon off. I didn't hear much Barnsdyke news, they haven't been there very much lately. They both like London.

He paused and looked with satisfaction at his letter, which was now covering quite a respectable proportion of the sheet of paper. Was there anything else he could tell Joyce? He considered, and then wrote:

Mrs. Perfect had an extraordinary little hat on, rather like an elf's cap with ear-flaps. I expect you could make one quite easily out of an old felt hat by slicing bits off and sewing them on again as you sometimes do. It would suit you.

He felt pleased with himself. He had seen Joyce cutting and altering her felt hats once or twice to make them like a picture in the paper, or like something she had seen in a shop.

I will try and draw it—he wrote, and achieved a sort of picture in the margin.—It is not as good a picture as Mary's, but never mind—you probably know what I mean.

He could finish up now.

So glad you got to a concert, dearest; you would enjoy it. I am glad Michael is getting better at night, and gives you more peace. Let me know if you are at all short of money; I have saved a pound or two. My best love to your mother and father, and grateful thanks for all their kindness. Dearest love to the babies, and all for yourself.

From CLEMENT.

V

Coming into the bookshop meant for Clement more than the beginning of the day's work. It meant his return to the society of his fellow men after the isolation of his leisure hours. It meant also an interruption in the ceaseless round of his worrying thoughts, since in the shop his attention must be given to the matter in hand. Already he loved the place, and felt it more like home than anywhere in London.

He was dusting the books one morning, and straightening them on the shelves, while the boy swept the floor. Old Fellows sat at his desk, reading the morning's letters. He was country born, and came from a little village in Oxfordshire, from which he had first gone to work in a bookshop in Oxford. There was still a smack of the country about him; he looked rather like a farmer in town clothes. He was a shrewd and competent dealer in second-hand books, with an extraordinary memory for any book

that had ever passed through his hands. He enjoyed tracking down a rare book. Often he could remember where it had gone to from him, and could tell whether it was likely to have stayed there or not. Sometimes he would remember where it had come from, and would know that others might come from the same source. He amazed Clement by the fullness and accuracy of his recollections, the more so as he had little knowledge of the books themselves. He seldom or never read a book except an occasional detective story, yet he always seemed to know what the books were about, as though he could get some idea from handling them, from their shape and colour and binding.

He was giving only half his attention to the letters on his desk this morning. He was watching Clement and thinking that he liked the way he handled the books—very carefully, and yet confidently, as though he were used to them. He had been afraid that he would have to have some raw lad in the shop while Darby was away, and his experience of them was that they were either rough with the books, or else handled them in a nervous, unfamiliar way that irritated him. This Mr. Dyson applying for the job had been a bit of luck. He was able to talk to customers about the books and keep them in the shop. It was all good for trade. Yet Fellows thought that it was odd that he should have applied for the job and should be content with it, as apparently he was. A gentleman and an educated man come down in the world. Well, there were still plenty of ex-officers who couldn't get anything to do, but somehow he did not seem quite that sort, although Fellows knew that he had been in the war. But the war did not seem to have been the most important part

of his life, as it so often was of their lives; he bore the definite stamp of a peaceful occupation. Fellows, watching him with his shrewd peasant's eyes, thought that he was like a certain kind of don at Oxford, a type with which he had grown familiar in his first bookshop.

He saw as he turned over the letters on his desk that there was one from Darby. He picked it up reluctantly. He knew that his new assistant was better than Darby, just as he knew a first edition from a second, but Darby had been with him five years, and he had promised to keep the place open for him.

"Mr. Dyson," he called a minute later. He still, without thinking, used the prefix to his assistant.

"Yes, sir?" Clement turned round from the shelf he was dusting.

"Come here a minute, will you?"

Clement came across to the desk, dusting a book that he carried. He looked down at his employer, smiling. It was his nature to be friendly, and now that he was so much alone, the friendliness in him seemed ready to run out at any contact with his fellow creatures. Through the mind of old Fellows passed the thought, "I like him. I shall be sorry to lose him," but he said:

"I've a letter here from Darby."

Clement's heart gave a jump.

"Yes, sir?"

"The doctor is letting him come back." Fellows paused, tapping the envelope with his pencil. "He will be back at the end of next week, so I am afraid I shall have to dispense with your services."

"Of course, sir; that was understood," Clement said,

as cheerfully as he could. It was so good a pretence at cheerfulness that it deceived Fellows, who said:

"It's been a bit of a lark for you, I expect. You'll be setting up a bookshop for yourself one of these days."

"I should like nothing better," Clement answered. "I'm afraid it won't be just yet, though. I've enjoyed working here, and you have been very kind to me."

He was turning away, but paused and added:

"If I try for anything of the same sort, perhaps you will be good enough to give me a reference."

"Oh, certainly," Fellows answered, rather surprised. Somehow he hadn't thought of his assistant as likely to go on with this kind of work, nor as needing a reference. He himself had taken him without one. He wondered for a minute if Clement were really hard up and dependent on his earnings. He dismissed it as unlikely. For a minute Fellows wondered whether he should tell him that there was no desperate hurry if he liked to stay on for a week or two after Darby came back while he got into the way of things again, but he decided not to. He didn't feel that Clement was a suitable recipient for charity, and it would be charity. He didn't want three of them in the shop,—couldn't afford it. He picked up a letter about second-hand copies of early miracle plays.

Clement went back to the books that he was dusting.

"And now what?" he thought, and his heart sank. Only a few more days of his temporary asylum! Only a few days more, and he would have to leave his island and plunge into the roar and whirl of the struggle for existence.

"I ought to be ashamed of myself," he thought. "How

many people have I known who have been like this all their lives—secure only while the job lasted. I am better off than they are now. I know my wife and family won't actually starve. I don't suppose I shall starve myself. At the worst, I could always go back to them. No, I can't do that anyhow. Not decent to expect Joyce's people to keep any more of us, even while I look round. The whole thing's my own doing, and I must look after myself. I am able-bodied and not old. I can do something, or if not, I deserve to go under. That's the law of nature—but I sha'n't go under—I'll find some sort of job."

He went on dusting the books and putting them on the shelf. On some deeper level his mind, troubled by a deeper insecurity, cried out:

"It's coming, it's coming. I knew it would, and I've no defences, I've nothing but myself now. It's the strongest thing in the world and it's coming nearer—fear! fear!"

A customer came into the shop and he turned aside to serve him. As he searched for the required book, he thought, with a start of relief:

"Thank God, it's Wednesday, and I can go and see the Perfects!"

VI

As Clement walked through Hyde Park in the afternoon, the weight and burden of his troubles slipped from him, and his heart rejoiced in the sunshine. His natural pleasure in life revived, his pleasure in the colour and stir and sweetness of it, in the warm air, in the movement of his own body. It was not possible to feel acutely all the time that the grave was the end of all things, and that

man at the best was insecurely poised above an abyss of fear and disaster. The natural man is so made that joys can entrance him and hopes attract him in spite of the abyss, as though somewhere in his instincts lies buried a deep-rooted faith in his own survival, whether his intellect disown it or not. Clement, as he walked through Hyde Park, did not know that he believed in God or in the life everlasting, but the essence and spirit of his being believed, and lifted up its head, knowing itself immortal.

He walked slowly, for he was before his time. The weekly visit to the flat had become an institution. It was the one thing in the week to which he looked forward with heartfelt pleasure, the one hour when he could expand in the assurance of sympathy. At first, he had been diffident about coming, afraid of being in the way, but insensibly he had come to realize that he was not, or had stopped thinking about it at all. He got on well enough with Rodney, who always came in some time during tea, and who was carelessly kind and cordial, accepting him as a friend of the family, but it was when he was talking to Veronica alone that he was aware of complete satisfaction. He knew the pleasure of speaking to one who spoke the same language, of her mind meeting his without hindrance or hesitation. She had a candour and directness of vision that made it easy to talk to her. He had never known her to pretend, or assume knowledge, or even adopt a ready-made view or opinion. Things which other people took for granted struck her afresh, their values unaffected by the standard weights and measures. Sometimes, as he talked to her, he was reminded of what he had felt when he saw Mary discover anything for the first time—the feeling of

seeing the thing as it really was, without the associations of custom and hearsay that had blurred it. Yet there was nothing childish in Veronica. She seemed to him far older than himself or Joyce or Rodney. She was, as so few people seemed to be, complete. She had very few uncertainties and small hesitations. She gave the impression of depth and certainty at the centre of her being. From that came her serenity. She was the most serene person he had ever known. He bathed in that serenity as in the sunshine of the flat, for although he had been there on dull days, he could never think of the place except as full of sunlight, as he had seen it on that first afternoon.

He climbed the stairs to the flat slowly, feeling suddenly very tired. He had been saving money on his food as far as he possibly could, since there was nothing else he could save on, and the long period of unsatisfying meals had sapped his strength although he did not know it. Since this first access of hot weather, he had been sleeping badly, waking suddenly out of bad dreams and lying long awake, worrying. It seemed to him a surprisingly long way to the third story. He reached it at last, and was raising his hand to the knocker, when he saw that the brass tablet bearing the word "Out" was exposed in the slot on the door. He felt a shock of wholly disproportionate disappointment. He had not said that he was coming, but it had grown to be the usual thing, and he had never dreamed of not finding any one in. Standing there on the small landing at the head of the stairs, he felt quite beaten, as though something had gone badly wrong with him. His hand trembled and his forehead was damp. He pulled himself together. Nothing had happened—only they had gone out. He

wasn't expected, or they hadn't remembered he might be coming. He looked at the small table by the door to see if by any chance there was a note or message for him. There was nothing but a little brass bell and a slender glass vase, with three tall spikes of delphinium in it. The flowers seemed to him to have a sort of grace peculiar to the flat and to everything in it. He turned and went slowly downstairs again.

It was close and dark in the stairway, and seemed an interminable way down. He remembered, unexpectedly, a bit out of the beginning of "Alice in Wonderland." "Down, down, down. Would the fall never come to end. I must be getting somewhere near the centre of the earth. Do cats eat bats, do bats eat cats? . . ." It was a long time since he had read "Alice in Wonderland." He remembered lying in a hammock in the garden at home, and hearing one small sister read it to another. He hadn't thought much of it then. He had been twelve years old, grown up and superior. There was a stage when you didn't like that sort of book, after you were too old to accept it solemnly as a story, and before you were old enough to appreciate it as fun. Mary hadn't come to either stage yet; she had it all before her. He would enjoy reading and telling her all the things he'd liked when he was young. You didn't enjoy books or games afterwards in quite the same way, not with the same whole-hearted intensity. Everything was spoilt after you grew up. Things let you down, turned out unexpectedly, were disappointing.

Clement reached the ground floor and saw Veronica standing in the entrance, in the sunlight.

The expression on his face, as of a shipwrecked mariner

catching sight of a sail, was lost to Veronica, who was looking for her key, but was not lost to a pair of shrewd brown eyes glancing over her shoulder.

Veronica shut her bag, and said:

"Come along, Curly, let's go up in the lift. It's too hot to walk."

She moved out of the sunlight into the shadow. To Clement it seemed, quite irrationally, as though the sunlight moved after her. He took a step forward and then hesitated, as he saw that she had a girl with her. She looked up and saw him.

"Oh, is that you? I thought you might be coming, and I meant to get back sooner, but I've been having lunch with Curly, and she's so greedy, I couldn't hurry her. Now we'll all go up and have tea for a change. Would you mind carrying the scones? Give him the scones, Curly; he won't drop them. But you haven't met before, have you? Miss Ashford—Mr. Dyson. Ring again for the lift, will you? I expect it's stuck."

VII

After Clement had gone, Veronica removed the tea tray into the pantry, and came to sit down in the window seat beside her friend.

"Give me one of your cigarettes—I like them better than mine. Oh, it's the last!"

"Never mind. Have it."

Veronica lit it, and they smoked for a minute in silence.

"I like that frock, Nicky. Is it Coralie?"

"Yes. Do you like it? I wasn't sure if I did."

"You don't often wear brown, do you?"

"No, I don't generally like myself in it. When I tried this on, I thought I did. I like you in brown best, I think."

There was another minute of peaceful silence while the smoke of their two cigarettes went up in thin spirals of blue above their hats.

"Where did you collect your extraordinary friend, Nicky?"

"Why extraordinary? Didn't you like him?"

"Yes—but I don't think he's quite like any one I ever met. I don't know what it is exactly. His face, I think."

"Don't you think he has a nice face?"

"Yes, and I think he thinks you have too."

"Well, so I have, haven't I?"

"Undoubtedly—but I want to know how you came across him."

"He was the vicar of the parish up in Yorkshire where Rodney's house is. He married us, you know—and after that he gave up his living."

"Good Lord! How awkward for you!"

"Oh, no, not because of that. Because he was fed up with the Church altogether, and he isn't the sort of person who can slur things over and make a compromise in his own mind, and just carry on somehow. Now he thinks he doesn't believe anything at all, and he's pretty miserable about it. Curly, what do you think about all that sort of thing?"

"I don't."

"You must, sometimes."

"Honestly, Nicky, I hardly ever do. When I do——" She paused and looked thoughtfully at her shoe.

"Yes?"

"Well, I think it will be all right, you know. I mean, I think we go on, and I think things will get straightened out for the ones who've had a hard time. But as to how, or when or where—search me! Do you think about it?"

"Yes, often. I don't see how any one could not. After all, we are here. There must be something to account for us."

Curly was looking at her with a half-smile.

"You are a funny girl. I never knew you thought about things like that. You seem to me the last kind of person that would."

Veronica blew out a little cloud of smoke.

"You're doing what I always complain of. You're dividing people into blocks, and calling them 'that kind of person.' You're saying to yourself, 'People who have frocks from Coralie and make up their faces and spend all their time enjoying themselves don't think about religion.' "

"Yes, I suppose I was."

"Well," said Veronica, "don't do it—or at least, do it if you want to, it's your business—but I do honestly think it's misleading. Directly you say in your mind 'that kind of person', you get wrong. There isn't any 'that kind of person.' There's only each person as it comes."

"I dare say there's something in that," Curly said thoughtfully. "It's awfully difficult when you meet any one that belongs to a certain type not to credit them in your mind with the qualities you think that type would have."

"It saves trouble," Veronica agreed, "like ready-made clothes."

Curly smiled. "You never did like ready-made clothes, did you? But go on about religion; I'm interested. Don't you think we shall go on, and things get straightened out?"

"Yes, oh, I think both those—but I think there's more to it than that."

"Well, what?"

"This is only what I think—my own idea of it—but, think of the happiest day you ever had, the best day in your life. I don't say your most important day—not the day when most things happened to you—but the happiest day, one of those days that had a special charm and glow of happiness like some days do."

Curly thought—of an early drive to a distant meet, of a countryside in the sunlight, of the run, of the ride home in the November evening; of a green sky, and the rusty colour of a beech hedge, and a horse's head moving against it. She had been eighteen, and had fallen in love, and she had never seen him again—couldn't even remember now who he was staying with at the time—but she remembered the day, an enchanted day, blessed from the start with a sort of magical luck.

"Yes," she said, "I've thought."

"Well, didn't you feel on that day as though you were more in tune with something—nearer to something—lifted up a little?"

"Yes, I don't know that I exactly thought it at the time—but I think I did feel like that."

"Well, I think what you were in tune with may have been God—and I think that feeling, only much more so, will perhaps be heaven."

"If that's religion," Curly said slowly, "it's a long way off from what people think it is. It hasn't, for instance, anything to do with being good—behaving well."

"I don't know—hasn't it? Isn't religion a kind of being in tune, and wouldn't anything mean or cruel be like going out of tune, playing a wrong note?"

"Then the universe would be one great choral symphony."

"Yes, I think I imagine it like that—you know the bit about the morning stars singing together for joy?"

Curly leaned back against the wall and clasped her hands behind her head.

"There are an awful lot of wrong notes, Nicky. So many that I sometimes think there can't be a God at all. It's a jolly world for us—but it's a hell of a world for some poor beggars—and not their fault either."

"I know. I know there are a lot of wrong notes, but there couldn't be wrong notes unless there were right ones. I mean"—Veronica frowned earnestly—"you couldn't be out of tune unless there was a tune to be out of. I don't mean a tune like 'God Save the King', I mean tune altogether, harmony, or rightness, or whatever you call it. If there wasn't a God, how could we know things were bad?—things like unkindness, for instance. I think that's worse than anything else. I sometimes think it's the only really bad thing. I expect that's because it's the least like God, the most out of tune."

"Well," Curly said, "if it is, you're in tune, anyway, my dear."

She jumped up and picked up her bag. She walked across to the fireplace, and stood powdering her face before the mirror above it.

"I must go—I'm going to be late." She turned round, shutting up her bag.

"I've enjoyed myself this afternoon, quite a lot. I'm so lazy. I don't think, unless somebody makes me. Is the ex-parson in tune?"

"Oh, I expect so, don't you? Only just at the moment I think he can't hear it—but I should think people often must be without knowing it."

"Well, good-bye. Don't come down with me. I'll ring you up about Tuesday if I can get seats."

After Curly had gone, Veronica sat on in the window seat, thinking about her.

"They were funny together at tea," she reflected. "Curly so certain, and the ex-vicar so inquiring. I do think it's better to be inquiring than sure—less final, and one can't be final in this world, whatever else one can be.

"Curly thinks it all right—we shall go on, and things will be straightened out for the ones who've had bad luck—but I don't think that's quite enough. I would have thought so, I think, before I loved Rodney, but since then I've known what things can be like. Loving comes from somewhere, is part of Something, Somebody. It isn't all ours. I couldn't say to Curly that I believe most in God because of loving Rodney, but it's true."

VIII

Clement sat at the bamboo table in the window of his lodging. Three or four newspapers were scattered about the table and on the floor by his chair. A pile of letters, addressed but unstamped, lay on the table beside him. He took them up and balanced them on his hand. So many waste stamps, so much waste paper! Well, they might not be. There might be a lucky one among them; the luck was bound to turn. His native optimism lifted up its head the more easily because after his afternoon at the flat there was a steadying glow at his heart. It was cheering to see other people happy. To know that there was happiness in the world was like a thin shaft of sunlight coming into a dark room.

He got up, put the letters in his pocket, and went out to buy stamps for them. The evening was hot, the air tired and sultry. The streets seemed full of dust and noise, of draggled women and quarrelling children. He thought with a sudden aching homesickness of Barnsdyke and the vicarage garden. There might be chimneys and smoke there, but there was space. There were fields between the mills and pit shafts, it was only half an hour's walk to the hills, there were green things growing, even if their growth was blackened and stunted. He traced with his mind's eye the satisfying outline of the hills beyond Netherfield, their round shapes, their cool solidity. In a town there was no distance to look into. Everything crowded close upon your eyes, and gave you the feeling of having

no room to think. He remembered the day when he had walked along the hills above Barnsdyke and decided to resign his living. He had thought then that the only way to live was to live in the moment, to take everything as it came, but he was no nearer to the secret of how to do it. Nearer? He was farther off. There was a ceaseless spur in his mind that would not let him rest. He could never now recapture that sense of being alive in the moment, unless it was in the flat, talking to Veronica. Sometimes then it came back to him, the tingling ecstasy, the mere thrill of existence.

He stamped his letters in the post office, and shot them into the pillar box.

"Not much hope there, really," he thought. He racked his brains again to think what he could do. Could he be some sort of secretary? He didn't know shorthand, he had no experience. An office? He'd never learned bookkeeping, he had had no business training. Some job in a shop—a bookshop or any other kind? He didn't care what it was, so long as there was some sort of permanency about it, a chance of making a home, of their being all together again. It was all very well to say that he didn't care what it was. He was beginning to discover that for any post of any sort there were at least twenty applicants, all of whom had better qualifications than he had, previous experience, technical knowledge—or they were young, unhampered by a family; they could start on a wage that would not keep him and Joyce and the children.

"It makes you see how useless the clergy are," he thought bitterly. Then his sense of fairness gave him the lie. "No, they aren't useless, they do hundreds of odd jobs,

they help people, they keep things together. A lot of them work like blacks for wretched pay. Anybody would be useless outside their occupation. That's because civilization has got so complicated. A man can't build his own house or make his own clothes, or get his own food. There aren't many places where he may even lie down and go to sleep."

He walked on a little farther, and thought: "Suppose Caldicott resigned his living—what would he do? He wouldn't have a wife and family to keep." Impossible to imagine Caldicott with a wife and family, or, for that matter, to imagine his resigning his living. Clement could imagine no combination of circumstances, inward or outward, that could shatter that impregnable faith.

A church bell began to ring close by. Looking up, he saw a red-brick mission church standing back from the street in a yard full of dust and straggling bits of paper. He looked at his watch. Five minutes to seven—evensong, he supposed. There was no crowd obeying the persistent ringing of the bell. He had not seen any one go into the church while he was walking along the street. The priest would have the service to himself, as he himself had had so many. Obeying an impulse, half sympathy, half idleness, he turned in at the gate and went into the church.

He saw at a glance that it was a poor church, but one where they were of what had been his own way of thinking. The building was new, the walls were bare. The altar furnishings were cheap but correct. Six brass candlesticks, a crucifix, two vases of rather faded sweet peas. There was no reredos, but a velvet curtain. At the side of the nave was a movable altar, probably used for children's

services. There was a gaudy plaster image of the Virgin and Child on the wall behind it, and its curtains and frontal were of bright blue linen. The air smelled faintly of incense.

Clement slipped into a seat at the back and knelt down from force of habit. He realized that he had nothing to say, and sat back on his chair, dusting the knees of his trousers. There was a girl three or four rows in front of him, and a weedy-looking youth on the other side of the nave. An old woman came in and sat down at the end of Clement's row. They seemed to be all the congregation. After a minute or two the bell stopped ringing. A surpliced clergyman came briskly in, knelt down in his place, and in a minute started the service.

". . . I pray and beseech you, as many as are here present, to accompany me with a pure heart, and humble voice, unto the throne of the heavenly grace, saying after me . . ."

The clergyman gave the impression of getting through the job in the shortest time possible without irreverence. His neat, quick voice came in with the alternative verse of the psalms like a minute gun firing after a volley of small arms. He walked to the lectern, opened the big Bible, and began to read:

"Then David said, 'this is the house of the Lord God, and this is the altar of the burnt offering for Israel.' "

Clement wondered idly what David would have thought if he could have seen the house of the Lord God and the company assembled there to hear his words so many thousand years after they were spoken. The amazing permanence of words struck him afresh, as it had struck him

even as a schoolboy, words that were the breath of man's spirit, his only immortality. Did it ever occur to David, singing, lusting, and fighting, that what he said would outlive what he did and what he was? . . . And the woman with the box of spikenard, very precious. Had not Christ said of her that wherever the Gospel was preached in the whole world it should be told for a memorial of her? And it was true. It was most marvellously true, that prophecy made in a country village by a wandering philosopher nineteen hundred years ago. "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away. . . ." That might be true too. . . . "In the beginning was the Word . . ." Clement stood up as the lesson came to an end.

"My soul doth magnify the Lord . . ." He had always loved that, loved the heart's outburst of joy, like the joy of all nature in its power to beget new life. His thoughts wandered away during the reading of the second lesson. He knew that Veronica never went to church. He wondered if she ever had been, and what she thought of it. . . . "Isolt came from the sea inland . . ." He saw the Isolt who was Veronica standing in the doorway looking up the church towards the bier and the priests, her veil still ruffling behind her in the wind from the sea, her cheek cold and bright with the spray. His mind returned to the service, and he found that he was on his knees. He had kneeled down mechanically with the others at the usual place.

"Lighten our darkness, . . . O Lord; and of thy great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night . . ."

He could almost believe because of the rightness of the words.

"The people who wrote the Prayer Book were inspired, all right," he thought. "It is almost as though the whole thing were true. Mustn't writing like that be an emanation from the truth? Anyhow, from a certain truth of the spirit? People would say that it was an age of great writing, an age of style. What is style, after all? It's only the outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace. But if Christianity weren't the most magnificent of lies, it couldn't have endured. It's so wonderful a lie that it deserves to be true, it can almost become true. A thing can if it's great enough. Or can't it? I don't know."

He pressed his face down on to his hands, as though he were praying.

"I'm tired," he thought. "Oh, God, let me stop thinking." Then he remembered that there was no God, but that his mind was following a habit. "Everything is getting on top of me," he thought. "I wish I could sleep more."

The service was over; he got up and walked out of the church.

In the yard he was overtaken by the priest who had read the service. He was a plump, youngish man, who moved as briskly as he had said the prayers. He wore a caped cassock, and a biretta which seemed poised uncertainly on the back of his head.

"Good evening," he said. "I don't think I've seen you in the church before. Are you a newcomer to the parish?"

"I'm not in the parish," Clement answered. "At least,

I don't think so. I happened to be passing when the bell was ringing."

"Well, we shall always be glad to see you here. On Sundays, perhaps? We have Mass at eleven. Children's Mass at nine-thirty."

"Thank you," Clement answered. "I don't go to church much now."

"Well, you could give us a trial," the priest suggested, with a quick look and a smile.

An uncontrollable impulse prompted Clement.

"Do you believe it all?"

The priest's smiling eyes narrowed.

"All what?"

"Everything—the Christian Religion—the Catholic Faith?"

"Of course I do." He seemed to hesitate and added, "Don't you?"

"No, not now—I did. I was a priest, but I resigned my living."

He had disturbed that smiling briskness.

"Really?" the priest murmured. "I didn't know—of course, seeing you in church, I—would you like to talk to the vicar? He's an older man than I am, a man of a good deal of learning and experience. He might help you."

"No, thank you," Clement answered. "I don't think any one can help, do you? It's a question of the individual truth."

The young priest murmured something about grace. Quite clearly Clement was outside his experience, and being brisk and efficient, he was unused to things that were, and almost annoyed.

"I mustn't keep you," Clement said. "Good night." He walked quickly away. The young priest looked after his retreating back.

"Might be a bit touched," he reflected. He went into the clergy house to his supper.

IX

Joyce was coming back from the shops, wheeling Michael and the shopping in the perambulator, while Mary trotted beside her. It was a hot day, and the leaves on the trees looked limp and dusty in the suburban street. Joyce thought regretfully of the garden at Barnsdyke. She had never dreamed how much she would miss it. Her mother's house had no garden at all. Every time the children went out, they had to be made tidy, and taken for a walk in the streets, or in the nearest park. They might not run on the grass in the park, nor touch the flowers. To Mary, this was an incredible deprivation, a thing so bad that she didn't really believe it true. Joyce had never dared to take her eye off her in the park since the day when the small fingers snapped off the nodding head of a pink tulip, and a keeper complained. It was as bad in the streets, for Mary would hang back to look at something, or run on ahead in a sudden spurt of excitement, and it was difficult to keep her by the perambulator when they were crossing a road. Altogether, taking the children out was a labour for which the admiring glances and smiles directed at Michael were hardly sufficient compensation.

Joyce walked wearily on along the pavement, talking mechanically to Michael, who was beginning to talk, and

required some sort of sound in answer, but didn't mind what. Other mothers passed her, also wheeling their babies, with older children walking by the pram. They were all doing it for their children's health and pleasure, all concentrating on their children, giving up their time to their children, adapting their minds to their children. Their lives were being centred in their children, and outside themselves, so that later on, when the children grew up and went away, they would not know how to go back to being selfish. They would say and think that when the children were tiny had been the happiest time of their lives.

Mary, who had been walking soberly for a few minutes, said, "Mummie, I'm tired," and hung back.

"Not so far now, darling."

"How far, Mummie?"

"Oh, just a few streets farther—look at that little boy bowling a hoop."

Mary was easily distracted.

"Yes," she said, much interested. "It goes round, round, round."

She took a little skip on one foot, forgetting that she was tired. She turned round, and began to walk backwards, so as to watch the hoop.

"Look where you're going, Mary," Joyce said sharply, but too late. Mary had backed into an approaching perambulator, and the dirty marks of the wheels were visible on the skirt of her clean cotton frock. The owner of the perambulator apologized.

"It was her own fault," Joyce said wearily. "I am afraid she was wool gathering. Now come along, Mary,

you're not hurt. I've told you before, you must think what you are doing."

"I'm not doing anything," Mary answered, aggrieved.

"Well, come along, we must get home to tea. Grannie will wonder where we've got to."

The words struck some chord of recollection in Mary's mind.

"Where's Daddy?" she asked. She answered her own question, as she often did.

"Daddy's gone to heaven," she remarked in tones of satisfaction.

"Oh, no," Joyce said, horrified. "Oh, don't say that. Daddy's in London."

Mary said no more, but remained unconvinced. She had early learned to associate Daddy with church, God, and heaven. When Daddy was not there at the vicarage, he was often in church, and now that he was away for so long, he was obviously in some protracted kind of church which was heaven. The contradictory statements of grown-up people made no difference at all to Mary's private convictions.

Joyce walked on with a worried frown between her brows. She wished Mary hadn't said that. It was absurd, of course, to imagine that because a thing was said it was likely to happen, but Joyce, like a good many other people, had an anxious feeling that it might. There was a sort of remorse mixed with her feeling, because lately she had been aware of a rising resentment against Clement. She was ashamed of it, but she could not help it. She was beginning to think that he couldn't really care about her, staying away all this time in London and writing so cheer-

fully, enjoying his bookshop, and going to see the Perfects every other day. It was all very well, Joyce thought; men had the easiest time of it when all was said and done. They went off to new places and got change and excitement. They didn't have to drag along, day after day, with the children, doing the same things, the same round of little endless jobs. That was what women did—unless they were like that woman Mrs. Perfect, who did nothing but please herself, and lead an entirely useless life.

A tide of hatred welled up in Joyce's heart. Here was she, living on as little money as she could manage, bringing up Clement's children, spending no money on herself, having no fun, getting old and plain and dull, and there was that woman, that affected, divorced woman, having everything and making every one like her. Of course you could be charming if you had nothing else to do, if you weren't disturbed every night by a teething baby, and worried all day long about money. Of course you could make a flat charming if you had all the money in the world and a maid to help you. If that woman had to run a great rambling vicarage in a place all smuts, and look after two babies at the same time, then it would show how much use she really was. But, of course, she wasn't any use. She was simply ornamental. An image of Veronica in her black frock with the crimson flower, her smooth dark head, her oval face, her hyacinth-blue eyes, came before Joyce's mind.

Michael waved his hand at a passing char-a-banc and broke into a chuckle of laughter. A woman walking past smiled at Michael and then at Joyce, a wistful, congratulating smile. Mary said, in a happy little voice. "Baby's

laughing." Suddenly Joyce felt better. She looked at Michael, rosy, plump, and chuckling. After all, he was worth the bother. It was a better and happier life to have children, even if they wore you out. It was far better than having nothing to do all day long but make yourself and a flat look charming.

"Here we are," Joyce said thankfully.

"Look, Mary. There's Grannie waving at the window."

She was undressing Mary that evening when her mother came into the room.

"A letter for you, dear. I think it's Clement. Shall I go on with Mary while you read it?"

Joyce looked up at the kind face under the grey hair. Her mother's cheeks were flushed, she looked hot.

"Mother, you look tired. What have you been doing?"

"Only just washing Mary's frock through, dear. I thought it was a good opportunity while Ida was out. She makes such a fuss about a little bit of extra washing."

Joyce sighed.

"I don't like you doing it. I ought to have been watching her more carefully."

"It didn't take long, and accidents will happen, won't they, Mary? Come and let Grannie give you your bath while Mother reads her letter."

"Oh, no, Mother, you've done enough."

"I'm not tired, dear, only rather warm. Come along, Mary."

"Will you tell me a tale?" inquired Mary, who had discovered that Grannie was more compliant than Mother in the matter of tales, though less satisfactory than the incomparable Daddy.

"We'll see. Have you got Mr. Sponge and Miss Flannel?"

Mary trotted off to the bathroom, her curls bobbing above the little blue dressing gown.

Joyce, left alone in the bedroom, pushed the hair off her forehead. She was hot and tired herself, after a tussle with Michael, who seemed to take on a new lease of life at bedtime. Joyce folded up Mary's little garments, still holding the letter in her hand. From the bathroom came sounds of splashing, and of a voice going on steadily.

"Mother is kind," Joyce thought. "But it's almost too much for her, having them here. They do make extra work—and she will do things. Poor Daddy, too, he has all his meals at different times, and he's all alone downstairs now with nobody to talk to. I do hope Clement has found something."

She sat down on the bed to read the letter.

A few minutes later she came into the bathroom.

"I'll finish her now, Mother. Go down to Daddy; he's all alone."

Her mother looked up, squeezing the dripping sponge above Mary's back.

"I sha'n't be long now."

"I want to finish her. Please go down." Joyce spoke shortly and shut her lips tight. Her mother glanced at her. She had seen that look once or twice before, once when there had been a battle royal between Joyce and a governess, once when she had quarrelled desperately with a school friend.

"Very well, dear." She handed over the sponge and went down.

"Grannie was telling me a tale," Mary said tentatively. She looked up at her mother's face.

"Mummie, why are you cross with me?"

"I'm not, but I want to get you finished. It's late."

Joyce lifted her out and dried her with vigour. Mary said no more. Joyce put her nightgown on, carried her to bed, and gave her her milk and sponge biscuit. She was aware all the time that the great hazel eyes were looking at her with a sort of puzzled reproach.

"Now lie down and go to sleep," she said. She kissed her. Mary lay quite passive under the kiss and did not put her arms round her.

Joyce ran downstairs and put her head in at the dining room door.

"I don't want any supper—I had too much tea. Don't keep me any."

Her father's face, looking up from the end of the table, had something of the same puzzled reproach in it as Mary's. She would not look, and shut the door. She went into the sitting room, and sat down at her mother's desk. She pulled a sheet of paper towards her.

Dear Clement, she wrote,

Thank you for your letter. If you can't find a job in London, I think you might as well come back here. You could have the dressing room to sleep in, and, anyhow, that would save you having to pay for your lodging while you find something. It would be very dull for you, of course, and you would not be able to spend so much time with the Perfects. I don't know how you can spend so much time there if you are looking for work. They are not our sort of people at all, and I think it would be better if you left them alone—especially considering her

reputation. Write and let me know if you want to come here. The children are both well.

With love,

Yours,

JOYCE.

She folded the letter savagely, pushed it into an envelope, stamped and addressed it. She went out into the passage, took a hat and a light coat from the rack, and went out. She slipped the letter into the pillar box on the other side of the road. If she didn't post it at once, she knew that she never would, and she knew too that if she did she would be sorry afterwards that she had.

She walked on along the street, down the next street, through the park where she had been that afternoon with the children. Her lips were close shut, her face flushed.

"That woman!" she thought. "That woman! I hate her. I wish she was dead. How can he like her? What fools men are! Can't he see she's just an empty-headed little painted thing—— Damn her! Damn her! I hope she'll die. Oh, God, I am wicked. Oh, God, forgive me! I didn't know I was such a beast. But she's taking him from me. She knows—she's doing it on purpose. She's that sort—and I'm not. I wish I was! I wish I was! Oh, no, I don't; it's a rotten thing to be. I wouldn't be like her for the world. If she takes him away from me, I'll kill her. Oh, what am I doing? That's murder, even to think of it. I thought I was a Christian. I'm not. I won't be if she takes Clement. Oh, God, forgive me—don't let me feel like this! Don't let me!"

It was half-past nine when she came back to the house,

tired out, with a blistered heel, and a feeling as though she had been violently shaken. Her mother called to her from the dining room:

"Joyce, is that you, dear?"

"Yes." She was hanging up her coat. "I've been for a walk."

"Come and have some milk and cake. I've got some hot milk here in a thermos."

Joyce came into the dining room. There was a small cloth on one end of the table, and the cake and a plate of biscuits stood on it, with a cup and saucer. Her mother sat in an armchair, darning a small sock in the fading light from the window.

"Are you feeling better?"

"Yes, thanks. Where's Daddy?"

"Playing patience in the next room. He's quite happy. Both the babies are asleep. I've just been up to look at them. You must get to bed and have a good sleep. You're tired with this sultry weather."

Joyce had a warm feeling of having come back out of wild and desolate places to somewhere familiar and kind. She was hungry now and glad of the cake and milk. As she ate, she watched her mother darning, her face serene above the needle. Had her mother ever felt like this about her father? Had she known storms and passions and wild anger? If so, she had lived through them. "One does, I suppose," Joyce thought. "In twenty years, I daresay, all this won't matter very much."

The slow tears gathered in her eyes and began to run down her cheeks. Her mother folded up the sock.

"What is it, little girl?"

Joyce knelt down on the ground, and put her head on her knee.

"Nothing," she said between her sobs. "I don't know. I was horrid. I am horrid."

Her mother's fingers stroked her hair, comforting her, as she comforted Mary.

"No, you're not horrid, darling. We all feel horrid sometimes. My little girl . . . Mother's little girl . . ."

X

On the morning of his last Wednesday in the shop, Clement woke from a sleep which had begun late, and had been troubled by dreams. He awoke out of a nightmare in which he was being swept away by a flood, a great tide that roared through the darkness. He seemed to come up out of that tide with a jerk and a wrench, as though some one were dragging the soul out of his body. He opened his eyes and saw the daylight coming in between the dingy lace curtains. His body relaxed with a sort of relief. He shifted himself on the pillow.

"Wednesday!" he thought, and smiled. This last Wednesday before his work ended was like the last treat of the holidays, which had always stood as a barrier between him and the thought of going back to school. He could manage not to think "We go back on Friday" so long as he could think, instead, "Tuesday" or "Wednesday is the picnic or the pantomime." It had been like that about this. Instead of thinking "No work after Saturday",

he had thought, "Well, I'll talk it over with her on Wednesday", and in that thought was encouragement and something like content.

He got out of bed and began to wash and dress. He wouldn't hear from Joyce this morning; it wasn't her day. He knew she didn't care for letter writing, but it gave him a blank feeling on the days when he had no news of her or of the children. He read and reread her rather brief letters, catching at the meagre illusion of family life. She wasn't a good letter writer, but when he heard from her, he did at least feel that he had a wife and children. He clung with especial desperation to the thought of his children, as his only immortality. Those small creatures, begotten of his flesh, were all of it that he now thought likely to survive. Their existence was his only shield against the personal extinction which he dreaded with passion. That terror of his childhood came back to him often now. He thought of it while he was shaving, and his hand shook. He leaned forward and studied his long, lined face in the glass.

"I can't be nothing," he thought. "I can't. There couldn't be anything worse than coming to an end. How do people bear it? How is it that every one can go on so calmly without knowing? It's no comfort that the life in me will go on into other lives. I want my life—me—myself. The thing that makes me a person. What is it? Where is it?"

He stared into the glass at the face half covered with a white lather. The hazel eyes looked back at him out of deep hollows, and he noticed how bloodless the skin of his face seemed, and how the wrinkles ran across his fore-

head, dipping in the middle like waves that always came a little farther in at one point.

"I don't think I'm well," he thought. "I don't feel it. It's the heat—and all the worry."

He finished shaving and began to dress. He tied his tie rather slowly, and not very well. He had got out of the way of it while he was wearing clerical clothes.

He was seized with a strong desire to go to Liverpool for the week-end to Joyce's people. If he got a week-end ticket, the fare wouldn't cost so very much more than his lodging and food for the few days. It was a shame to come on them, but they wouldn't mind. He would be off again somewhere at the beginning of the week. He did want to see Joyce and the children, and he also badly wanted to escape from himself, and from the damnable loneliness. Ought he to sponge on his father-in-law, even for one week-end, when the poor man already had his family on his hands? Perhaps it was hardly decent—but he did want to see them all: Michael wouldn't know him, and Mary—would she have forgotten him at all? He thought that if he could get out of London, back to the North, some of these terrors might abate, he might see things more clearly. He wouldn't so often have that nightmare of being swept away by the flood.

His landlady came up with his breakfast on a tray. It was the only meal he had in his room, he went out to an A.B.C. shop near for the others. He glanced at the breakfast. The bacon, thickly cut and half congealed on the plate, looked unappetizing. He didn't want it. He poured out some tea. Then he saw that there was a letter from Joyce propped against the sugar basin. Half in pleasurable

anticipation, half afraid of something wrong, he opened it, and began to read.

He read it twice before he grasped any idea of it. "Joyce!" he thought. "Had she really written that? Was that how she felt about him?" He sat quite still, watching a large fly that walked round the rim of his teacup. He hadn't really known Joyce before, then. It was a stranger who had written that letter—not his wife. She was angry with him. She thought he was wasting time in London, not trying to get work. She thought he spent too much time visiting the Perfects—— Well, she never had liked Veronica. What had she said?—"especially considering her reputation." How damnably unkind! He had never dreamed she felt like that. He didn't know, really, how she felt about those things, but he couldn't have imagined she would say that about any woman unless she hated her, and why should she hate Veronica? She didn't like him going there; she thought he went there too much; she thought he liked Veronica too much. A blinding flash of realization suddenly lit up his mind.

"She thinks I love Veronica—and, my God, I believe I do!"

He pushed aside the tray, stretched out his arms across the table, and hid his face between them. It was as though his mind, preoccupied with the loss of his faith, had been torpid in this other matter, and now the shock of Joyce's letter woke it to life. He understood now the intensity of his longing for those Wednesday afternoons, the warmth that crept about his heart at the thought of them, the feeling that he had when he came away from the flat, as though sunlight and serenity had seeped into his very soul.

He saw quite clearly Veronica sitting on the window seat, her head turned towards him, a sort of sweetness about her lips and eyes. He groaned aloud. He had not seen where he was going. He loved her; he wanted to be always with her—and he himself had married her to Rodney, while his own wife and his children waited for him at home.

He sat very still beside the untasted breakfast. The fly left the rim of the cup and walked over the back of his head, across his collar, down on to his shoulders. His emotions were so mixed that even in his own mind he could not put them into words. Amazement, shame for his disloyalty to Joyce, a sort of triumph in the acknowledging of his love, an anguished sense of loss because it could not be fulfilled, a stunned, bewildered feeling, as though life had launched yet another shock at him—they were all seething in his mind. He felt as though he had travelled a great way in a very few minutes, and struggled to see clearly where he had come. It was as though his dream had come true, and he were indeed caught up in a flood too strong for him.

After what seemed a long time, he lifted his head. The first definite thought emerged from the chaos. He must never go near Veronica again. He wouldn't go to the flat that afternoon. He must drop clean out of her existence; it was the only decent thing to do, the only possible amends he could make to Joyce. He wouldn't go to Liverpool now; she wouldn't want him. Perhaps she wouldn't ever want him again. He wouldn't blame her. Rotten for her to guess what was happening from his letters, when he was too much of a fool to guess it himself. Rotten for

her, stranded, left there in Liverpool. A rotten business altogether. Never to see Veronica again, never to talk to her—he felt as though the light of his life had gone out . . . nothing now but the flood and the darkness. He saw what she'd been lately—the only light, the only thing left him that was like faith. He had turned to her as he had been accustomed to turn to God. Where was he to turn now? . . . No God, no light, no hope. He must even deny himself the thought of her in loyalty to Joyce —— Why should he? What did loyalty matter in a world of chaos ruled by fear? But Joyce, poor Joyce, his wife and companion, the mother of his children, so plucky and patient—— She mattered if anything did. To do what was best for her now was the only thing left. Get some work, keep away till she wanted him. . . . Crush the other out of his mind. . . . He groaned again, and his head went down on to his arms on the table.

After a few minutes he stirred and got up. He felt so giddy that he was obliged to clutch at the back of the chair and sit down again. In a little while his head cleared. He poured out some water, drank it, and felt better. He mustn't be late at the shop. He got his hat and went out to catch his bus. He stopped thinking, and as the bus carried him westward, he sat in a kind of stupefaction, grateful for the cool air on his face, aware only of a great blank and emptiness in his heart.

On Saturday Clement said good-bye to old Fellows and the bookshop. He received his last week's wages, and a little leather-bound copy of the *Republic,* which the bookseller thought a suitable parting present for a man of his education. Clement thanked him gratefully and went

away, feeling as though he had severed his last link with a friendly world. He walked home to his lodging to save the bus fare. He had never in his life before felt so utterly alone. There wasn't a soul in London he could talk to. There wasn't any one who would care in the least what happened to him. He had never before felt so small, such an infinitesimal part of the great scheme of things. He was only one of millions who were born and died and vanished.

It was absurd to think that it could matter what happened to him. He went to his room, threw himself down on his bed, and fell into a heavy sleep.

He awoke about eight, hot, and with a dry feeling in his mouth. He sat up on the bed. The window was open, but the room felt stuffy and airless. He thought he would go out. If he walked now, he might sleep at night; otherwise, he certainly wouldn't, after sleeping now, and he dreaded the torment of his thoughts during the sleepless nights. He supposed he ought to have some supper, though he didn't want it, but he had had nothing since lunch. He went out and took a bus to the Strand. He went into a Lyons' café, and ordered a cup of coffee and sandwiches. The place was full, the marble-topped tables were crowded, the waitresses hurrying to and fro with foaming tumblers of iced drinks and plates of food.

The coffee, when it came, made him feel awake and alert, as though all his senses were sharpened. He began to notice the groups around him. Two young men at a table near were talking about the people and affairs in their office. Both voices had the cockney twang. He had never got used to it. He had always missed the broad

speech of his own people. At first, when he came to London, he had hardly been able to understand the busmen and porters. He wondered if he could get a job as a porter. How did you get that sort of job? Did you need references, previous experience? It struck him how very little one half of the world knows about the way the other half lives. He looked at the girl who was writing out his check. Could he get a job as a waiter? He hadn't a dress suit, except his old parson's suit. It had been expensive enough fitting himself out with mufti, he had left that till times were better. Perhaps some places supplied dress suits to the waiters. He didn't even know that. He paid his bill at the desk and went out into the Strand.

He walked down into Trafalgar Square. It seemed comparatively quiet after the noise of the Strand behind him. He looked up at Nelson on his column. That was immortality, he supposed, as near as a man could get to it. One could almost imagine that a spirit survived, up there, high above the city, looking towards France, watching. Perhaps the League of Nations ought to pull that column down instead of reducing navies. He hoped they wouldn't. He had seen enough of war, he never wanted to see it again; but there was something up there that he didn't want to lose, something very familiar, almost part of himself. He walked on past Whitehall and down Parliament Street, until he came to the Embankment.

He leaned over and looked at the water slipping past him.

"What does it all matter?" he thought. "Everything goes on like the river. Why bother about things, try to struggle against them. Why not just let them rip? Things

happen—it's not our choice. I didn't want to stop believing. I didn't want to love Veronica—they both happened. We're all slipping down towards a dark sea. Why worry about the Ship of Truth? The great thing is to snatch at a little warmth and comfort on the way—if we can. Why shouldn't I love Veronica? In a few years, she and I and Joyce won't exist, so what can it matter? Terrible to think of Veronica not existing. Her face, her eyes, her voice coming to an end, and whatever it is that is her, that makes her herself. Terrible to think of that being swept away. It almost seems as though something must be permanent—the essence of her. No, it's only love that wants to make things permanent, and love itself isn't permanent. Nothing is permanent. If I look at the river any more, I shall dream of it."

He turned and walked along the Embankment.

XI

Veronica was sitting in the armchair in the flat, very still, her head pressed against the cushions. She had been out, and had just come in. Her bag and gloves were on the table. She had thrown off her hat, and the smooth ripples of dark hair were flattened against her head. Only her eyes moved.

"Extraordinary," she thought, "when these things happen to you! So ordinary when they happen to other people. Not ordinary at all really, of course . . . mysterious and exciting. Exciting to think of a strange person coming into your life, coming so mysteriously. Rodney will be glad."

She heard Rodney's footstep outside. He stood in the doorway, smiling at her.

"Hulloa! Any tea?"

"Not yet, I've only just come in. I'll ring in a minute."

He came across, stooped down and kissed her.

"Tired?"

"No, I'm thinking. Rodney, we're going to have a baby."

"By Jove!" He stood up and stared down at her.

"Are you glad?"

"I should think so—but—are you?"

"Yes, very." She sat up straight, and pushed the flattened hair off her forehead. The forehead, thus bared, looked remarkably clear and candid above the deep blue eyes, set wide apart.

"I'm surprised, Rodney. I mean, I think it's a surprising thing now that it's going to happen to us. I've got quite used to it happening to other people."

"Yes," Rodney agreed thoughtfully. "So have I. But that's quite different. It is unexpected, somehow, happening to yourself. A lot of things are like that."

"Most things," Veronica agreed. "Getting married—being in a motor smash. Probably dying."

"Don't talk about dying," Rodney said hastily.

"Why? Shall you mind?"

"I should mind if you did," was the thought in Rodney's mind, but he said:

"Let's have tea. I expect you want it." He rang the bell.

Both of them were silent during the bringing in of tea. As Rodney took his cup, he said:

"Isn't it Wednesday? What's happened to your friend the ex-parson?"

"I don't know. He hasn't been here for three weeks. I haven't heard a word from him. I hope he's all right."

"Oh, he'll be all right. Got a job somewhere out of town, perhaps."

"It seems funny he didn't let us know, or write to say good-bye."

"Yes, it does, but he was a funny fellow. Do you know his address?"

"No—only that he had lodgings somewhere in Bethnal Green."

"Then we can't do anything about him," Rodney said comfortably. "Probably he's gone back to his wife's people. Best thing he could do, I should think. Perhaps his father-in-law will push him into a job."

"I rather wish we knew."

"Then I'll find out," Rodney answered promptly. "Some one will have heard at Barnsdyke. Don't you worry about him. What are you going to do now?"

"Take off my things and have a rest."

She stood up and he looked at her.

"All right?" he asked, wondering if she were perfectly happy or at all startled, if she wanted him or would like to be alone.

She nodded her head.

"Perfectly all right, thank you, Rodney. Let's go out to dinner somewhere, shall we, to celebrate?"

"Rather. I think I shall go out for a stroll now. I'll be back in about an hour."

Rodney went downstairs and out into the street. He

walked towards the Kensington Gardens. There, walking by the Round Pond, he drew in a deep breath and exhaled it. Nicky was right. The thing was surprising and stupendous when it happened to you, however used to it you were when it happened to other people. It was absurd to reflect that every one you saw in the street, in the gardens, the porter, the elevator man, the people in the shops, had all at one time or another been equally surprising and stupendous to somebody. It was absurd, but it didn't alter the fact, didn't make the thing seem any less of a miracle.

"Wonder what he'll be like," Rodney thought. "Jolly to have a son—show him all sorts of things, have him in the business, take him about with you—or a little girl with Nicky's eyes. Whichever it is, we'll give it a good time. Gad, I had good times when I was a kid! I'd like it to have them too, and when it grows up, Nicky will be wonderful with it."

There drifted across his mind a vague wish that he himself were somehow a little more wonderful, a little better altogether. It was his unconscious tribute to this miracle which was to be performed, and to the Source and Origin of the miracle of life, dimly guessed at, scarcely apprehended. It passed, hardly felt in his general content.

"We'll go back to Barnsdyke soon," he thought. "Better for her than town. I don't know about the Burnands' yacht—— Better not, perhaps. We'll go somewhere quiet —near the sea. She won't be able to hunt this winter. Pity, I wanted her to get to know people. Well, never mind." He counted up the months. "About February or March, I suppose it will be. I hope to God she'll be all right. Oh, she will, she's very strong—things do go

wrong, of course. I'll get some one to have a look at her straight away, the best man there is. Where shall we go to-night? Wherever she likes; I don't care. I could kick the moon."

He left the garden, walked into a florist's shop, and bought flowers recklessly—rosebuds, a sheaf of carnations, iceland poppies which Veronica especially loved. Carrying very carefully the armful of colour and sweetness, he went into the building and climbed the stairs to the flat.

XII

Veronica was alone in the flat, writing letters at her desk. She finished the last, closed the desk, and went to the window. It was wide open, but very little air came in. The evening was close and stifling, as though a storm were coming. Veronica picked up a book and sat down in her favourite place on the window seat. The light was getting bad, and the book was not absorbing. She let it lie open on her knee, and herself lay back, dreaming.

A footstep outside the door roused her, and a shuffling noise, as though some one were carrying something heavy that brushed against the wall. She was surprised. Rodney was out of town, and she had not expected him back so early. It was not Rodney, for there was a knock at the door.

"Come in," she called out. She put out a hand and switched on the reading lamp on her desk. The rose-coloured light filled the room with a soft glow, but did not reach far enough to illumine the figure standing in the doorway. She tipped the shade back.

"Oh, it's you," she said. "Good evening. I've been wondering what had happened to you."

Clement stood by the door, leaning one hand against the wall. Something in his attitude startled her. She looked again more closely, and the incredible thought crossed her mind that he must be drunk. He came towards her unsteadily across the room. His eyes seemed to have sunk right into his face, but they were bright with a fixed feverish brightness.

"Veronica!" he said. "Forgive me! I couldn't help coming."

His voice sounded queer, cracked, and unsteady, but he wasn't drunk; she saw that now, only ill. She was a little afraid, but more sorry for him.

"Good Lord!" she thought. "What has happened? I must keep him here till Rodney comes. I'm sure he's ill."

She said, as calmly as she could:

"Sit down and tell me about it."

He didn't sit down, but leaned over the back of a chair, grasping it with his two hands. He said, in the same queer voice:

"I didn't mean to come here. I swore I'd never come again, never see you, never speak to you—but I wasn't strong enough; I couldn't do it. Besides, what does it matter? It's only such a short time before we go. There's a great tide sweeping us all down towards the sea." He held up his hand, and she saw that it was trembling.

"Listen—can't you hear it? The waters murmuring—getting nearer."

A little shiver of fear took her at the uncanny sound

of his words. Was he mad? She was alone with him up here; the maid went home at night. Still, she had only to put out her hand and ring for the porter. What had he been doing to get like this? He must have had an awful time.

"What have you been doing?" she said.

He answered her mechanically. "I've been trying to find a job." His voice rose. "I've been walking all over London—I don't know how long—trying to get away from it, from the sound of the water, from the tide coming, but I couldn't get away from it. I could hear it everywhere. Only here—it's not so loud in here—this is the only safe place, because I love you, Veronica. Love can cheat fear—for a little while, but not for long—it's the only thing that can."

His chin went down on his breast, and he was silent. She was silent too, trying to think what to do with him. She was no longer afraid. She couldn't let him go like this to go on wandering round London, ill, half starved, a prey to imaginary terrors. If only Rodney would come! She wondered if he had had anything to eat during his day's wandering. He was thinner than any one she had ever seen, he looked worn out.

"Will you have some coffee?" she said. "I'll soon make some."

She got up, walked across to the door, and switched on the other light. He looked up, blinking at it. He was leaning on the chair as though he would fall if he let go. He looked as though he might collapse at any minute. She almost wished he would; it might be easier to deal with him, and Rodney wouldn't be long now.

"Sit down," she said gently. "We can talk about it—there's plenty of time."

What had he said about loving her? He couldn't really mean it, he didn't know what he was saying. He sat down at last, obeying her mechanically. She didn't like to leave him to make coffee, but she could get the whisky out of the dining room. Was it a good thing to give him, she wondered? It might excite him too much. If only Rodney would come.

He began to talk again, but more rationally.

"I ought not to have come, Veronica. It was damnable of me, because of Joyce. It's been so hard for her all through. She didn't understand, you see. Everything's hard; the whole world's hard. Hard and cruel. I didn't see it before. I was blind. That was because I believed everything I'd been told about God. Now I know there is no God. How could there be? He couldn't have made the world like this. There's only fear, dreadful fear, fear of the end, of the darkness."

She saw that he was shivering, in spite of the oppressive heat. Could she leave him, just for a minute, to put a kettle on the electric ring in the next room? She could leave the door open.

"I'll be back in a minute," she said. She went quickly through into the kitchen, filled the kettle, put it on the ring, switched on the heat. She would make some tea; it was quicker than coffee. She went back into the sitting room. He was sitting huddled up in the chair, leaning forward, with his elbows on his knees and his chin in his hands. He looked an incongruous figure among her graceful furniture and flowers and pretty cretonnes—so hag-

gard and thin, looking so ravaged and despairing, even in the soft, rose-coloured light. He looked up at her. He said:

"Have you ever been really alone—without any one to speak to, and no one to pray to—no help anywhere? I didn't know what it was like. I can't tell you. Like being in an endless darkness. That was why I couldn't help coming here, because you are like a light, Veronica. The only light—do you remember?—'No light, no mark.' That's what it's like. 'The soul goes out alone, on seas unknown.' I can't. I daren't go; I won't go. I can't come to an end. I can't."

"You won't," said Veronica reassuringly. "None of us will."

"We all shall. Once I thought not, but I was wrong; I didn't know. And if we all do, nothing matters. It doesn't matter what we do. So I can tell you I love you."

"Good God!" Veronica ejaculated mentally. Aloud she said:

"Nonsense. You've got Joyce and the children. Have you forgotten them? You'll go back to them, and all be happy together again."

"Joyce is angry; she doesn't want me. You can't blame her. She's like all the rest of us—she is being carried away by the flood."

"You're talking nonsense," Veronica told him. She felt the remark inadequate, and wondered what in the world to say or do with him. She was aware that it was not her kind of situation, and she couldn't make out how far he knew what he was saying.

"I think you're probably wrong about Joyce," she

achieved. "I think you're not well, and imagining things. When you are better, everything will be different."

He answered, half to himself:

"Things can't be different more than once. They were different when I found out that there was no God. They can't look different again after that. That's the whole thing. It's at the bottom of everything."

Veronica heard the kettle boiling.

"Wait a minute," she said. "I'm going to make some tea."

She went into the kitchen. She fetched the teapot and warmed it, found the tea and put spoonfuls in the pot, filled up the pot with water.

"Poor devil!" she thought. "What a mess! I thought he was having a bad time, but I didn't know it was so bad as this."

She pulled out a cake tin, and began to struggle with the tight lid.

"He doesn't mean it about me. It's only because he has been lonely, and he's half off his head. I wonder if I ought to telephone for a doctor. I think we ought to let his wife know. And now I can't find the milk."

She heard the door shut in the next room.

"There's Rodney! Thank goodness! Now he'll know what to do."

She withdrew her head from the cupboard and called out, "Rodney! Come here a minute!"

There was no answer, no sound from the next room. Rodney must have looked in and gone out again. Perhaps he had thought the room empty and gone to their bedroom to look for her. She found the milk and poured some into

a small jug. It was very quiet in there! She put the tea things on a tray and carried them through.

The room was empty. She stared round incredulously. Where was her visitor? It couldn't have been Rodney when she heard the door; it must have been him going out. She ought not to have let him go! He most certainly wasn't in a fit state to be wandering about alone! He might fall down in the street, get run over, perhaps try to get run over! She went out quickly on to the landing, and rang the bell for the lift. It seemed to her a long time coming. She was carried down and spoke to the porter. Yes, a gentleman had come down about two minutes ago, and had just gone out. She went to the door and looked along the street, but there was no one in sight. She didn't know which way he had gone, she couldn't scour London for him, but she was gravely troubled. She went up in the lift to her own floor.

XIII

The sensitive mentor within Clement awoke into startled life as soon as he was left alone in the sitting room. Why had he come here? What had he said or done? Been disloyal to Joyce, given himself away, betrayed his secret? And Veronica? He ought never to have troubled her. He didn't know what he had been saying. Things seemed to say themselves; he wasn't sure of what was coming. Blind panic seized him. What would he say or do when Veronica came back? The thought that he was here alone with her made him giddy. Besides, he could not sit still. If he sat still, the tide might sweep over him. He must keep moving before it. It was his only safety. He

felt dimly that it was his only sanity. He got up from his chair and went quickly out of the room.

On the way downstairs, his legs and arms felt unreal, as though they did not belong to him. He had a swimming feeling in his head, and his body seemed light, borne up by the air. He passed the porter without looking at him, and went out into the street. It was just getting dark. He hated the darkness. He must try to get back to his lodging before it came. He would walk, of course; he couldn't go in buses or tubes, because if the great tide came, they would be borne along with it. What would it feel like at the moment to be utterly submerged, engulfed by the water? Would it feel at all? What would it be like to stop feeling? Like going to sleep? Well, he'd been desperately afraid of going to sleep as a small child; he had sat up in bed and held his eyes open with his fingers, he had thrown off the warm bedclothes to keep himself awake. Not to lose touch with yourself, that was the great thing. . . . Not to let go, not to be swept away. But what could you do when you had nothing to hold on to?

Although he meant to get back to his lodgings, he walked without any definite idea of his direction, choosing the quieter streets by a sort of instinct. Once at a street corner he stood still and listened to the murmur of the city all around him. "The waters moan like bells." There was a sound in the murmur like bells ringing. He hadn't liked bells as a small boy; they were sad, they made him cry. Where had he heard something about bells lately?

> "The way was long,
> And ever she heard the bells ringing
> Their goodly song."

That was Veronica—Isolt—coming from the sea to the church door, and somebody lay dead in the church under a shield. That was why he had never liked bells; they were ringing for somebody dead—for himself perhaps. You could come inland from the sea, but you went back to it. "The soul goes out alone. On seas unknown." His soul was afraid. It clung to the shore; it couldn't bear the strangeness and the dark—not now that there was nothing to steer for, no one to guide it—and he had no ship of truth, so he was drowning—drowning.

He thought about Joyce. She seemed far off, and not real, part of the time when things had been ordinary. He wouldn't see her again, he supposed. The children? He didn't know. He seemed to himself to be carried on by the tide past Joyce and the children, leaving them on the bank. At some time or another the tide would sweep them in too. Suddenly it seemed to him that he could hear the murmur of waters coming nearer. He began to walk at a furious pace. The sweat was running off his body, his limbs still seemed not to belong to him. It was now quite dark. In a quiet street, along an empty pavement, he began to run. The murmur was growing louder and louder. His fear was upon him. He ran, or tried to run, faster to escape it. He could see in his mind a dark wall of water sweeping down upon him. The noise of it seemed to be inside his own head. In another minute the darkness would engulf him. He stopped running from sheer exhaustion. Suddenly he was aware of an overwhelming sensation of physical illness. At the corner of the road he saw the red lamp of a doctor's surgery. He walked towards it by instinct. His fear was very close upon him,

the tide rising in his brain. He stumbled up to the door of the doctor's house and rang the bell. Then the waters swept over him and engulfed him, and he fell in a heap on the doorstep.

PART THREE

"STARS LIKE GLOBES"

I

The train from London to Melchester ran swiftly through the placid English midlands on an August evening. The day, which had been showery, was clearing for sunset. In the low light, tranquil and golden, the wide fields of Huntingdon had an air of undisturbed serenity; the farms and villages looked as though they were settling down upon themselves like birds roosting for the night. The trees were heavy with the green of midsummer—the hedgerows had been washed of their dust by the morning showers, and the roads seemed to wander at their leisure over the indifferent and unexacting countryside.

Clement, sitting in the corner of the railway carriage, felt as though he had awakened out of a nightmare to the everyday world. The taste of the nightmare was still in his mouth, the smell of it in his nostrils, but its power over him was gone. He was a free man again at the beginning of a new day.

"It's an extraordinary feeling," he thought. "Like being born again—and yet nothing is very different. I was ill, and now I am all right again—but nothing else is changed. I still haven't any faith. I still haven't any work. I can't yet have my wife and children with me, or manage to keep them—but something is different. It's as though something got tighter and tighter and tighter, and then

snapped—and now I'm free in a way that I never was before."

He looked out of the window and saw a row of small, new, red houses on the outskirts of a village. In one of the gardens a young man and a girl were sitting together on the square of lawn in deck chairs. In another a man was gardening in his shirt sleeves, while two little girls in school tunics stood talking to him. In a third a young father and mother were watching a small child walking unsteadily across the grass.

"If we could have a little house like that!" Clement thought. He wondered what Joyce was feeling. He had written to her as soon as he could, and had told her that he had been ill, and was now nearly all right again. He didn't want her to feel obliged to come to him. She had written to him several times, affectionately, but with a sort of reserve. She filled up her letters with the children's sayings and doings, as though she were shy of writing about anything more personal. He felt the shyness, and it affected his own letters. More than once he had started to write a letter to her which would break it down, but he was afraid of hurting her. Also, he felt as though she wished to keep him at a distance, to treat him as the children's father, rather than as her husband. If she felt like that, he did not want to force himself into her mind. It was her right to define their relationship. He must be content to take what she could give him. Besides, how could he explain to her? Could he write and say, "You were quite right, I did like Veronica very much; I did think I loved her—but I was nearly mad all that time in London, and the loving was part of the madness. I still think of

her as one of the beautiful things of the world, but not as having anything to do with me. I don't want her any more; I want you and the children. You won't ever believe it, but I did want you all the time; I never stopped thinking about when we should all be in a house together again."

No, he couldn't write that letter, it sounded too unconvincing, and yet it was absolutely true. And it might make Joyce feel driven into a corner. Perhaps she didn't want to show him what she felt or thought. He couldn't intrude on her private feelings; he had forfeited the right. He would get work, make enough money to keep a home together, and then go to her and ask her if she would share it. If not, he didn't know. . . . She must live where she liked, and keep the children if she wanted, and he must work for them all. An absurd mess he had made of the whole business for her, and he must just do what little he could to make up for it.

Was there, he wondered, any thread of purpose or design running through the pattern of human lives? He had thought about that a good deal during the fortnight when he was in hospital and the weeks afterwards when he was convalescing in Macallister's house. Certainly it seemed as though some guiding fortune had led him to Macallister's door on that night, which he hardly now remembered any more than a man remembers a night of delirium. No one in the world could have been kinder to the stranger who had dropped upon him out of the darkness. He could never be grateful enough for that vigorous and effective kindness. He had never come across any one whose behaviour seemed to conform so closely to the practical standards of

Christianity. Yet Macallister could not help him to solve his great problem. He recalled a conversation one night as they were sitting together in the doctor's study. He had asked suddenly:

"Do you believe in personal survival?"

He could recall the exact look on Macallister's face, in the shrewd brown eyes looking at him over the pipe.

"I don't see any satisfactory evidence for it."

He had said, stumbling into the question unawares—

"Don't you mind?"

Macallister took the pipe out of his mouth and tilted back his head.

"No—why should I?—it's the natural end. I've three children, and I shall survive in them. I sha'n't be a cul-de-sac." He added, looking at Clement, "This question of surviving has worried you a good deal, hasn't it?"

Clement nodded.

"What are you afraid of?"

"Coming to an end—losing myself, letting go of myself. I can't explain, and I can't understand how people cannot be afraid of it."

"Most people don't spend much time thinking about it. Something has pushed it out of focus in your mind. Probably at some time or other you wanted to come to an end, wanted the separation of mind and body. It's a common effect of a religious upbringing. It's the old Puritan idea that the body is evil."

"My religious upbringing wasn't Puritan."

"You don't realize how much Puritanism has crept into every kind of religion. You told me yourself that you

couldn't stand the Church's attitude toward divorce. Just think of St. Paul—there never was a bigger Puritan. Just think of the normal attitude of a good many of the clergy. No, I haven't any religion myself, except that I believe in some sort of a general order, scheme, pattern to which things work—call it the law of nature, or the principle of things; it doesn't much matter—but I respect religion. I respect Christ as a practical philosopher, but Puritanism I regard as the real devil. Why, it's in your own book of Genesis. Puritanism was the curse that descended on Adam and Eve when they ate the forbidden fruit."

"If you believe in an order of things, why do you think things have gone wrong? How did evil get into the world?"

"I don't know, except that laws have been broken, and wherever you get a breach of law—I mean, of course, natural law—you get suffering as a consequence. That's so with the human body, and it's the same with everything."

"Doesn't it worry you?"

"No, I can't say it does, except that I hate to see things going wrong in the human body through ignorance or bad luck. I mean by bad luck things like bad housing, bad food, bad air, unhealthy work—things that it ought to be possible to remedy."

Clement had looked at the thin, dark face behind the pipe.

"You're happy, then?"

"On the whole, yes, very. Life's interesting and my work's interesting. I've got a wife and children—and not

too much time to think." He had added, laughing, "You'll be happier when you get some work."

The train ran through the green countryside.

"That's not enough," Clement thought. "If being happy means that you haven't time to think, then there must be things that would make you unhappy if you did think. I don't think that what satisfies Macallister would satisfy most people. We do all so terribly want something to direct our lives to. He directs his to his work, and his work is healing, so it's directed towards good. Perhaps that's like directing it towards God." And suddenly Clement thought, "Perhaps that's worship. Perhaps he worships without knowing it. Perhaps we all do. If we do—can't there, mustn't there be Some One to worship?"

He sat quite still, looking through the window at the darkening sky.

"We've all got the capacity for falling in love, but we don't love without an object, something to wake the capacity. I suppose we've all got the capacity for worship. Could we have the capacity if there wasn't anything to rouse it? So many people worshipping in different ways all over the world, Christians and Mohammedans, and Pagans—mustn't something have roused it, or Some One, even if it is Something or Some One very dimly apprehended, felt, not understood or known or seen? Is God there, after all?

"Suppose I was right when I believed—only my believing was all mixed up with other things, and I believed the wrong way? Suppose they were all right—the Mohammedan kneeling on his prayer mat with his face to the East, the Pope in the Vatican, the Brahmin in his temple, the

heathen dancing round an image—even people who don't know they believe anything definite, people working for a cause, living for some one they love, people serving an art, people just trying to live up to their own idea of what's decent? Suppose God was behind all these things, and almost every one was worshipping, whether they knew it or not?"

Outside the hurrying train the night was now dark. Clement roused himself and looked out of the window. He saw the countryside dotted with lights, the glow of a furnace, flame and smoke coming from a chimney.

"Hulloa!" he thought. "We're in Yorkshire." His heart leaped as it had done when he was a small boy coming home from school. He had been so afraid then of missing the first station in Yorkshire because the names flew so quickly past him.

There were more lights, lighted houses and streets, trams and shop windows. The train began to slow down to a big station.

"Sheffield," he thought. He let down the window and leaned out of the carriage. The familiar smell of soot and smoke in the air, the familiar sound of the Yorkshire voices! How he had loved that first smell and sound on his way home from school, and even from Oxford. A party, much laden, flung themselves against the door of his carriage, and he drew back to allow the entrance of a family,—a mother with a baby and a parcel, a father with two bags and a basket and an evening paper, two small children with buckets and spades. They disposed themselves on the seats. The whole family looked weary and bedraggled from the efforts of the journey, but they were

cheerful; they all smiled at Clement, except the baby, who stared at him with grave interest. The train started again. The father opened his evening paper. He was the usual undersized West-Riding workman, with lively eyes. He said to Clement:

"They 'aven't done so bad against Nottingham, seeing they've two men off in the Gentlemen and Players. I see Percy Holmes 'as got forty, but they gave 'im out l.b.w. Ah! he's a nice bat, is Percy Holmes, a right good bat!"

The mother said, "Well, I never thought we'd catch t' train. I'm sure we've been lucky. Gladys, keep your feet off the gentleman's trousers." She also addressed Clement. "We could 'ave come by an earlier train, but we didn't want to leave before we need. We've been a week at Cleethorpes."

"Have you enjoyed it?" Clement asked.

"E-e-h! It was grand!" And they told him in turn about the amusement park, and what the weather had been like, and how many people had been there, and what their landlady had given them for tea, and how they had met a friend from Barnsley, where they lived, and how they had been in a boat and Gladys had been seasick, and how they had all had their photographs taken sitting in a car on the sands. They produced the photographs and a packet of picture postcards. They also showed him a photograph of their eldest girl, who had died five years ago, before Gladys was born, and they told him in detail what she had died of. They told it all to him with a vivid enjoyment in the telling. His heart went out to them; he was absorbingly interested. He could almost have embraced them all, even the unattractive Gladys, with her sandy feet.

"This is the only part of the world to live in," he thought. "Thank heaven, I've come home!"

II

Getting on to the tram the next morning to go down to the printing works of Wheatley and Baines, Clement was reminded of the last time he had taken this same route to go down to St. Paul's on the night of the E.C.U. meeting. The possibility of meeting Caldicott crossed his mind, and as though the thought had been telepathy, a plump, black-coated figure appeared on the platform of the tram above the steps. It was Legard, whom he had almost forgotten. He was sitting on the outside seat, and Legard saw him at once. A sort of quiver passed across his face. He hesitated, smiled nervously, and finally sat down next to Clement.

"Hulloa!" he said. "I didn't know you were in the North. How are you?"

"Very well, thanks—I only came down from London last night. How are you?"

"Oh, I'm all right, thank you," Legard answered, with a movement of his features that looked as though it were going to be a smile but thought better of it.

"I suppose he feels uncomfortable with me—as though I were a traitor," Clement thought. Aloud he said:

"How's Caldicott?"

"He's gone for his holiday. I've just been seeing him off at the station. He was to have gone next week, but his mother's been ill, so he started to-day to go to her first. Lamb's away—he won't be back till next week."

"You'll be pretty busy then, if you're single-handed."

"Yes." He added, "I sha'n't mind that. To tell you the truth, I'm rather looking forward to being alone a bit. It will be easier to think."

Clement nodded. He could imagine that thought might be freer in the absence of Caldicott's powerful personality.

The conductor came up to take their fares.

"Fond of fresh air, are you?" he said conversationally.

"Yes." Clement smiled at him.

"Ah, well, you'd get plenty if you had my job. I get more than I want sometimes. I've come in in the winter that cold I can't bear to thaw sudden."

He passed on to the inside passengers.

"It is nice to get back here," Clement said. "Our people make the rest of the world seem unsociable."

Legard agreed, as though he had not heard what Clement was saying.

"How are you getting on?" he said suddenly.

"Well, I haven't got a job yet. I'm going down now to see an old friend of my father's, to see if he will give me one."

"Oh, yes, of course; there is that too," Legard said vaguely. "But I meant really, I—if it isn't an impertinent question—do you regret what you did, or are you quite happy about it? Don't think me impertinent," he added hastily. "I have a reason for asking."

"I'm not altogether happy about it. I certainly don't regret it. I couldn't have done anything else."

"No," Legard agreed. "One does feel that—one gets driven." He shifted on his seat. "I suppose you must have

felt it awfully at the time—I suppose it was an awful wrench—deciding to do it, and all that?"

"Yes, it was, though in a way it was a relief at the time. I think it was worse afterwards, when I realized it more."

"Yes, I suppose it would be," Legard said, rather unhappily. Another of those nervous movements that could hardly be called a smile quivered across his features. The colour rose in his face, and he said:

"I suppose you haven't thought about the Roman Church?"

"I had a fancy that way when I was about sixteen and read Robert Hugh Benson's novels. I've never been inclined to it since."

"It never attracted you?"

"No. I couldn't see anything that it could give that our own Church couldn't."

"Oh, yes, Dyson!" Legard exclaimed. "The discipline, the order! Every one knowing where they are, all the services the same wherever you go. Why, there would be such a certainty about it! Look at all the trouble and disturbance there is in our Church about the Prayer Book, and all the bishops disagreeing, and all the different shades of opinion in the Church. It's heartbreaking. Didn't you feel it?"

"It wasn't so much that that I felt. I think it's better to be in a Church that allows a certain amount of freedom."

"But the lack of unity—the muddles, the quarrelling, and not always being able to respect and follow the people set over you—the bishops."

Clement smiled, catching an echo of Caldicott.

"I'll tell you," Legard went on. "I want to have this week alone, so as to think over it. I want to make up my mind whether I'll go over. I—I want to. I've been thinking of it for a long time—but it's such a big step." He added, "I haven't said anything to any one yet," and looked quickly at Clement. "I don't mind telling you, because you've had something like the same experience, and I haven't forgotten the things you said that night when you came to the E.C.U. meeting. I respected you for saying them."

Clement was silent, very sorry for him, but well aware that there was nothing that he could say to help him. At the moment Legard was more in need of a sympathetic listener than of any help or counsel.

"I don't know how I shall tell Caldicott," he said. "I don't think I could. I like him so much, and he's been so awfully good to me. And I don't know what my people will say. They are very Protestant. They think St. Paul's is bad enough. This will be an awful blow to them."

"After all," Clement said gently, "it's your own affair, isn't it—not Caldicott's nor your people's?"

"Yes, of course it is, but I sha'n't like upsetting them—and—nothing ever is quite your own affair, is it? I mean it always makes a difference to somebody else."

"Yes, that's true," Clement agreed, thinking of Joyce.

"Then there's another thing," Legard stammered on. "I suppose, if I go over, I shall be a priest after a time. I don't think I can imagine being anything else. That means never marrying or having children. I don't mind about that myself. I was engaged to be married five years ago—I don't know if you knew, but we broke it off—and I'm

an only child, my people will feel that—no grandchildren, you know; my mother has always wanted them. I wish you would tell me what you think," he ended suddenly. His mild blue eyes searched Clement's face.

"I can't," Clement said. "It's so absolutely a thing for you yourself to decide. I quite see all you say about hurting your people and Caldicott, and so on, but if you really feel, yourself, that's what you truly believe, doesn't that settle it?"

"Yes, I suppose it would if I was sure," Legard meditated. "On the whole, you would advise me to go over? You would go over if you were me?"

"No, I couldn't advise you—and I don't think I could be a Roman Catholic under any circumstances."

"It's a great tradition," Legard said wistfully. "A great society. It's so large and strong and powerful—one would feel secure—with a great force behind one."

"I suppose one would. Yes," Clement thought. "I see the attraction. I remember thinking when I went to Mass in London that I wished I could join then and have done with it—but I never could. Too much like going into the regular army—giving up the right to make decisions for yourself, letting yourself be moulded into a pattern, submitting to more discipline than is good for any grown-up person. Yes, the Roman Catholics are the regular army, and the Church of England is more like territorials—freer, a looser organization, more chance of using their intelligence—and I suppose I'm a civilian. Poor Legard, I wonder he dares to think anything that Caldicott would disapprove of. I think perhaps he would be very happy in the Roman Church; he likes being disciplined—loves it.

But he'll hate all the fuss and the bother of going over. Caldicott would say it's impatience again."

"I get off at the next stop," Legard said. "I'm glad I met you. It's been a relief to talk to some one. Perhaps you'll look me up one evening if you're going to stay here. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye!" Clement said. "The best of luck—whatever you decide. If I'm going to be in the town, I should like to come some evening."

Legard climbed down the steps and crossed the road to the vicarage.

"I think I shall do it," he thought. "I'm sick of all this chaos. I want to be certain." For he too had had a glimpse of the Ship of Truth, and he had no heart for that lonely voyage on an unknown sea. He wanted to turn his back on it and climb into a strong fortress for safety, even if the bolts and bars were drawn behind him.

III

As he crossed the dusty yard towards the offices of Wheatley and Baines, Clement wondered why he had not had sense enough to think of this before. He liked the kind and genial Wheatley, and if there was no job available, there was no harm done by asking. He had been anxious at first to get right away from every one who knew him, but his first sensitiveness had worn off. There was a change in him since he had first resigned his living. He had met and survived his worst terrors, he had talked them out fully with Macallister, and seen them in the clear light of day. He stood more firmly on his own feet.

Even his manner was changed, though he did not know it. It was older and more assured. He had taken a further step out of the lingering childhood which dies so hard in many men, and in some never dies. By the painful process of learning to think and decide for himself, he was coming slowly to his full stature. He could not yet tell that the keel of his Ship of Truth was forming beneath his feet, but he did know and feel that he was no longer drowning.

He knocked at "Inquiries" and asked for Mr. Wheatley. He was taken into a room, and asked to wait. He could hear the clack of typewriters in the distance and the dull noise of some heavy machine. After a minute a door opened and a girl came in.

"Did you want to see Mr. Philip?"

"No, Mr. Wheatley, please."

"Mr. Wheatley's away on a holiday. I think Mr. Philip could see you."

Clement was taken aback. He might have expected this in August—but perhaps Philip could give him his father's address and tell him if there was likely to be a job going.

"Can I see Mr. Philip, then, please?"

The girl disappeared. A minute later she came back.

"Will you come this way, please."

Clement followed her into a larger room next door. Philip Wheatley was sitting at a table well strewn with letters and papers, but with a copy of the *Sportsman* open in front of him. He jumped up.

"Hulloa, sir. How are you? Do sit down. My father's away, I'm afraid, in Scotland, but I'm carrying on for him. Is it anything I can do?"

"Well, I don't know," Clement said. "As a matter of fact, I wanted to ask him if he could give me a job."

"Would you like mine? I'm fed up with it."

Clement laughed. "I should like it very much. Have you had it long?"

"Three weeks," Philip said impressively, "not counting August Bank Holiday. Every morning I leave the house at nine o'clock or thereabouts, and some evenings I don't get back till a quarter to six. Then they say our generation doesn't work—but what sort of a job do you want?"

"Anything I can do. Perhaps if you would give me your father's address, I could write to him."

"He won't answer—and you couldn't read it if he did. He doesn't write letters much, you see, unless he has a typist handy. And he won't be back till the middle of September." A shade of hesitation crept into Philip's manner. "Do you want the job pretty soon?"

"I've got to find something pretty soon."

"I see. Well, would you like to see Baines? He'll know what's going. As a matter of fact," Philip added, with a burst of candour, "I don't know much about this business yet. I'm supposed to be in the works half the day picking things up, and in here the other half, reading the copies of letters—but I haven't picked up much in the works except racing tips, and I get so damned sleepy reading the letters, with that machine making a soothing sort of noise outside. Still," he added cheerfully, "I shall grasp it in a day or two. I'm going to take a course of Pelmanism and liven up the office. Come along. I'll show you old Baines' room."

He led Clement down a passage and knocked at a door.

"Here's Mr. Dyson, sir, a friend of my father's. He wants to see you."

He marshalled Clement into the room and shut the door behind him.

Clement saw a tall, grey-haired man, with a narrow, still face, sitting at a table. His first feeling about Mr. Wheatley's partner was that he would very much rather have made his suit to Mr. Wheatley. A pair of shrewd blue eyes looked him up and down.

"Won't you sit down? Mr. Wheatley is away on holiday until the middle of September—I expect Philip told you. Is it anything that I can do?"

"It's only this, sir. I was going to ask him if he could give me a job, or recommend me to any one else who could give me one."

The face opposite to him was not encouraging.

"What sort of work are you looking for?"

"Anything I can get," Clement answered. He felt instinctively that Baines did not like vagueness, and added, "I thought perhaps I might be a traveller."

"Have you done anything of that sort before?"

"No. I've sold in a bookshop for two months, that was all."

The grey eyebrows seemed to rise a little.

"What sort of work have you been accustomed to?"

"I was a clergyman—the vicar of a parish. I resigned my living."

"Really?" Baines murmured. Clement had the feeling of being looked at as though he were something out of the Zoo. Should he say that he would write to Wheatley,

or wait until he could see him? But he couldn't afford to wait six weeks; he had nothing to live on.

"I'm afraid we haven't anything suitable for you at the moment, Mr. Dyson. We have no vacancy for a traveller, or in the office, and, of course, in the works a good deal of technical knowledge is required. I will keep your name in mind and speak to Mr. Wheatley when he comes back."

"I am afraid," Clement said desperately, "that I must get something before then. I have absolutely nothing to live on."

"I see." Baines tapped the blotting paper before him. "I suppose you wouldn't care to work in a quarry—an ordinary quarryman's job?"

"Yes, I should," Clement answered promptly, so promptly that a faint smile came over the still face.

"Have you ever been in a quarry, Mr. Dyson?"

"Yes. I've been over a slate quarry in Cumberland."

"This is a limestone quarry—not slate. It is up in the dales. You understand that it means an ordinary workman's job—chipping bits of limestone off the quarry face, and loading them into bogey trucks? Pretty hard work, and not much variety—but if you care to take that for the time being, it is possible that we might be able to find you something better here a little later on. As regards wages, you are paid by weight. If you care to work full time, you can easily make three pounds ten a week. Most of them don't. They make as much as they want to live on that week, and no more. You'll be able to get a room somewhere up there. I'll give you a line to the foreman. You will find it a reasonable place to live, but very quiet."

He added, "By the way—are you married?"

"Yes, sir, and two children. At present my wife and the children are at her home with her people."

"I see," Baines said again. "Well, that's all I can offer you at present. Something may turn up later on. I can't say. What do you say about it?"

"I'll be only too glad, sir, and very grateful to you for giving me the opportunity."

"Better try it first," Baines said grimly. "When can you go up there?"

"This afternoon."

"Right." Baines rang a bell. "Will you wait a minute, and I'll give you a note to the foreman."

During the dictating of the note, Clement thought swiftly. He could live on less than three pounds a week. A good many people kept families on less. He wondered if it might be possible to get a tiny cottage up there. Would Joyce mind being a workman's wife? It wouldn't be any harder work for her than it had been in the vicarage. Anyhow, he would be able to save, and something else might turn up, and then he would have a little money in hand to start a house with—there would be the removal of their furniture and all that. This wasn't the sort of job he had ever thought about or expected, but a sound instinct told him that it was unwise to start refusing work in the hope of anything different or better. He was a beggar, he mustn't expect to be a chooser. He was full of reviving energy; he liked the idea of outdoor manual labour. When the secretary had gone out to type the note, Baines spoke to him again.

"It will be a change for you," he said. "Not much like

a parson's job." A sort of curiosity was visible behind his dry manner. "You won't mind that, perhaps?"

"Not at all."

"Had enough of it, I dare say. Well, I've often thought it must be very tiring, having to be so much better than other people." He became suddenly confidential. "I'm a Unitarian myself—or at least my father was, and I went regularly as a boy—but I don't go now; it isn't what it was. There used to be some wonderful preaching—in the old days. I've seen carriages all down the street in front of the chapel, and top hats going in as thick as black beetles —but now you don't get the same stamp of intellect."

He drew a little picture on the blotting paper.

"Then there's the social question. My wife likes to go to church—now we've got on a bit—and my daughter got accustomed to going at school."

"How interesting people are, when they begin to tell you things," Clement thought. The glimpse of the human being inside the dry Mr. Baines, the dispenser of work, thrilled him with a sudden sense of the infinite varieties of life.

The secretary came back with the note. Clement took it with renewed thanks.

"I dare say you won't take to it," Baines answered grimly, reverting to his former manner.

When Clement had gone out, he said to his secretary:

"I think that might be a useful man. If he sticks it in the quarry for a month or two, I shall know he is some good. We shall want some one when Taylor goes. Curious," he added. "He has been a parson."

Miss Clarkson, the secretary, pursed up her lips.

"Yes, I know, Mr. Baines. I've heard him preach at St. Paul's."

"Oh, have you?" Curiosity was still stirring. "Was he good?"

"Oh, yes, Mr. Baines, he was ever so nice"—she added, with the same little pursing up of her lips, "then."

IV

Joyce and her mother sat on the sands at Silecroft with their backs against the low grass bank that sloped down to the shingle. They were both knitting. Michael was crawling about on a rug in front of them. He could stand alone now, and even walk, but a rug spread on shingle was an uncertain footing. He found it less trouble to crawl on it. Down at the edge of the water Mary was paddling, splashing joyfully in the tiny waves under the placid supervision of her grandfather, who was strolling up and down, smoking a pipe. The sands were almost empty. A peace undisturbed by cars or buses hung over the little village behind them, and behind the village the round green hills stretched away towards the lake country.

Joyce put down her knitting and lay back against the bank. She was bareheaded, her fair hair ruffled by the wind, her cheeks browned by the sun and sea air.

"It is peaceful here, isn't it?" she said. She closed her eyes to listen to the sea. A gull flew crying above them. The sound of its crying and of the sea reminded her of all her seaside holidays as a little girl. She felt at once happy and sad, and as though everything touched her keenly with a kind of sharpened sweetness.

Her mother said:

"I wish Clement could have come here to us for a week or a week-end. It would do him so much good after being ill. Don't you think he could manage it, if you asked him? I could give you a little money, and you could send it to him for his fare. You wouldn't need to say where it came from. Don't you think he would come?"

Joyce turned over and lay face downwards on the sand.

"I don't know. I don't think he could when he's just started this new work."

Mrs. Wylie looked at her doubtfully. Joyce didn't sound as though she wanted him to come—and now that he was in the North again, surely it was very odd that he hadn't come to them in Liverpool, even for a night! Of course, he was no doubt very hard up, but still it was funny that he hadn't managed that—and it was funnier still that Joyce hadn't seemed to mind. There was something not quite right between them. It was such a pity, Mrs. Wylie thought, when a family had to be broken up, and a young husband and wife couldn't live together. Little things were magnified so by distance. Joyce had never been quite the same since the night when she had had that letter from Clement and had gone out for a walk, and had come in and cried. Mrs. Wylie looked at the fair head resting on the bare arm. She knew that her daughter's impressions were very durable. She couldn't ask her what was wrong. Joyce would never tell her, and she would be quite right. Still, she was worried. Much as she enjoyed having Joyce at home again, she did wish that she could see them all settled in a little home of their own. Didn't Clement want to see his children? He had always been such an affection-

ate father. A pity about his religion, poor boy! Probably it was all these upsets about the Prayer Book and other things, worrying all the clergy so dreadfully.

Mrs. Wylie thought for a minute about religion. She very seldom thought about her own, because she had never been accustomed to think about herself much. All the same, she knew that it was there, just as the bank that she was leaning against was there, though she wasn't thinking about it all the time. She wondered if all these young people thought about it too much. Perhaps it was like a plant, and it was better not to be always digging up the roots. All young growing things, plants and babies, did better if you weren't always worrying them. Anybody's religion, here in this world, must be a young growing thing, because, of course, it would only be complete in heaven. But, also, of course, things changed. Mrs. Wylie knew that she herself liked a good many things that Joyce and Clement didn't like—sentimental evening hymns, churches where they had sung matins at 10.30 and only wore surplices, things like Stainer's Crucifixion that they couldn't bear. Still, they were always nice to her, and it didn't matter.

"Asleep, Joyce?"

"No, only lazy."

"Does Clement say if he likes the new work?"

"He doesn't say very much about it, except that it's a limestone quarry, and he's got very comfortable rooms in a cottage, and he likes the other people he works with—and he says the country is lovely. But he doesn't say what sort of work he is doing."

"Superintending the quarry, perhaps," Mrs. Wylie said

vaguely. "Or I expect there is an office there. Perhaps he looks after the correspondence. I hope he's quite all right again."

"He says so."

It was a hard little dry voice, and Joyce's face was still turned away from her.

"I'm not surprised at him having a nervous breakdown, poor boy; he must have been worried to death by the whole business, and I don't suppose he looked after himself in London, or got proper meals."

"No, I dare say not."

Mrs. Wylie suddenly began to feel a little bit annoyed with Joyce. She looked at her own husband strolling so happily by the water. If he'd been ill, she would have gone to him to make sure that he was all right, even if she didn't hear till he was better. She wouldn't have been happy until she had known exactly what work he was doing, and whether he liked it, and whether his landlady was looking after him. She had, like most of her generation, strong ideas of a wife's duty. It was a wife's duty to look after her husband and see that he was well and happy.

"When we get home," she suggested, "you could easily run over for a day and surprise him."

"I think he probably wouldn't like to be interrupted when he was working."

Mrs. Wylie said no more. She rolled up her knitting and put it in her bag. She got up, rather stiffly, and walked down across the shingle and sand to the edge of the water. Her husband turned and smiled at her.

"Coming for a stroll? That's right. Isn't it time this monkey came out of the water?"

"Are you cold, Mary?"

"Oh, no, Grannie, no! I'm very hot! I've found a dear little dead crab! Can't I stay just a few more minutes?"

Mrs. Wylie looked at Mary, standing ankle deep in water, her waders splashed up to the waist, her cheeks very pink, her eyes very bright.

"Just a little more minutes, Grannie?"

"Very well," and as she stood watching with her hand through her husband's arm, she wished that Joyce was a little girl again.

Joyce sat up and pushed the soft hair off her face. She looked at the three down by the water. She knew quite well what her mother thought. "Taking Clement's side against me!" she thought resentfully. Then her resentment faded. She wanted to ask him to come, she wanted to go to him, but she was so ashamed. She would never stop being ashamed of that silly letter she had written. She didn't want to see him, because seeing him would remind her of it; and yet she did want to see him because she loved him and missed him, and when all was said and done, her life with him was her real life. That was where she belonged—with him. She was a visitor anywhere else, even in her own father's house. Surely, if she felt like that, he must feel it too, even if he had admired—yes, even if he had been in love with Veronica Perfect. He must want her and his children—but suppose he didn't, and she thrust herself upon him. After all, he could probably manage to get over to Liverpool, if it was only for a night, if he wanted to. Well, if he didn't want to, it was partly her fault. That letter! Her cheeks grew hot with shame.

Michael raised himself precariously to his feet, tottered towards her, and stumbled into her lap with a shout of laughter. He rubbed his head against her shoulder and made noises of affection. She put her arms round him and rested her cheek on his funny little fair head, warm from the sun. He was a darling! She looked over his head at Mary splashing about in the water, and at her own father and mother watching her. It was fun, this holiday all together, but it wasn't Michael she wanted, nor Mary, nor her father and mother; it was Clement, who probably didn't want her any more, who wouldn't come near her, whom she'd practically quarrelled with, and who was the only thing that really mattered in the whole wide world.

V

Clement was breaking stone on the floor of the quarry near the foot of the quarry face. All around him the ring of hammer on stone echoed back from that sheer wall that showed up like a white scar on the green countryside. It rose to a height of nearly three hundred feet, cleft out of the slope as though a man had thrust a spade straight down into the sloping side of a sand castle. The fields ran up on either side of it, and the trees climbed down to meet it from the hilltop, making a fringe of wood where the children found bluebells and wind flowers and primroses in spring.

The August sun was beating down into the quarry, drawing out the heat from the limestone, so that men shrank from going too near the quarry face. Clement's arms and face and neck were burned red-brown, and in

the khaki shirt and breeches, the remnant of his army days, he would hardly have been recognizable to his late parishioners. He threw down the hammer and straightened his back for a moment. He was growing used to the work. In the first week every muscle of his body had ached, until he could hardly drag himself home at night or out of bed in the morning. The palms of his hands had blistered, and his eyes had ached with the white glare of the limestone. Now he had been at the job three weeks. His muscles were growing supple and strong, and his hands were hardening. He was beginning to be able to fill a truck as quickly as the other men. He tasted the pleasure of physical achievement, of matching his strength to a task and finding it equal to it.

He picked up the fork and began to load the broken stone into the bogey truck. He pushed the truck down one of the innumerable lines that crossed the floor of the quarry to the junction, where it joined the line of trucks that the quarry horse would draw towards the weighing machine. There the stone that he had broken would be weighed, and the tally kept of the money owing to him. From there the stone would go to feed the never-dying fires of the Hoffmann kiln. They had told him that if those fires went out, it would cost a hundred pounds to relight them. They had told him of how they had been watched day and night during the coal strike, and of how the manager had scoured the countryside, offering fabulous prices for a wagon of coke here and there to feed the precious flames. They had a fascination for him. He seldom failed to look in during his dinner hour at those slow red fires steadily devouring the stone, changing it to the lime which

he saw daily loaded on trucks and sent off to make paper, to make plaster, to sweeten the tilled fields.

The warning that a shot was to be fired was sounded on the big gong, booming and reverberating through the quarry, and reëchoing from the walls. Clement threw down the hammer and went to the shelter built to protect the men from flying stones. The men crowded in in dilatory fashion, grumbling and slow. They derided this precaution for their safety. They would have ignored it altogether if they had not been afraid of the foreman, and would have stayed outside within the danger zone, just as in the trenches in France they had been too casual to bother to keep their heads down. It was a curious indifference to danger, Clement thought, or rather not so much indifference as a sort of unconscious belief that whatever happened wouldn't happen to them. They all knew that a man had been injured by flying stones in the spring because he had disregarded the signal and stayed outside the shelter, but they would all have stayed outside if they had been allowed to. It seemed to Clement that there must be deep in each one an extraordinary assurance of his personal survival. He looked round the shelter, dimly lighted, smelling of shag and sweating bodies. They were still grumbling, and it was as though each one said, "I'm all right. Nothing can make an end of me—what a fuss!"

Clement went to the doorway and looked out. He could see Croft, the manager, and Hardisty, the foreman, and another man up on the green mound behind the offices. He could see the square box which he knew had the switch on it. He saw Croft step towards the box and put out his hand to it. There was a deafening report, and a piece of

the quarry face five hundred yards from the group around the switch seemed to slip suddenly and slide down to the floor in a cascade of stone that ended in a heap, from which a little white dust rose before the echoes of the report had died among the hills. "Marvellous!" Clement thought. He knew that it was an everyday matter in the quarry, but he could never cease to marvel at it, at that touch of a finger on a small switch, and the almost simultaneous fall of six hundred tons of stone five hundred yards away.

"It's like faith," he thought. "It moves mountains."

He went back to the quarry face, and to his breaking and filling.

When the hooter sounded for the dinner hour at twelve o'clock, he went into the shelter, took his lunch out of his pocket, and strolled away through the quarry. Sometimes he lunched with the men in the shelter. They had begun by being suspicious of him. They did not know that he had been a parson, but they felt him an alien. They were growing more friendly, but still with reserves.

They were of larger build and slower speech than his parishioners at Barnsdyke. They had grown up on country air and food, their bodies were toughened and developed by the hard outdoor work. Some of them walked five miles to begin their day's work at half-past seven in the morning. They seemed to Clement to have few diversions. The nearest town was five miles away, and they did not often go into it. They went to the public house in the village, but seldom got drunk there. Most of them had gardens and grew vegetables. One or two kept pigs or hens or goats. All of them were skilled poachers. They set snares

for hares and rabbits in the woods and caught trout in the streams. They had been known to kill a pheasant in July and offer it to the manager as a present, asserting that it came into the quarry and would not go away, although they threw stones at it. What Baines had said of them was true. They seldom exerted themselves to earn more money in a week than they required for that week's living. They seemed to have no desire for any surplus, and no particular anxieties about the future.

"I'm not sure that isn't the way to live," Clement thought. "One way, anyhow."

He was in a state of physical satisfaction and mental laziness in which the thought of such a life appealed to him, although he knew in his heart that it would not content him. He climbed over the fence that separated the quarry from the old quarry—known as Murgatroyd's quarry from the name of the man who had bought it and been broken by it, for the limestone turned out to be no more than a shallow vein. Now the half-made quarry was overgrown with grass and primrose roots, and the scars made by the picks were fringed with ragged robins. There was a patch of cool shade in the hollow, and Clement sat down there to eat his lunch. His landlady had made him a green-pea pasty, a double, triangular wedge of pastry stuffed with fresh green peas out of her garden. He ate, and then filled a pipe, and lay full length on the grass.

The sky above him was extraordinarily blue, unbroken by any wisp of cloud. A clump of loosestrife grew just by his head. When he turned his eyes, he could see the tall spikes of green with their pinky-purple flowers. Their grace and aspiring delicacy amazed his heart. "I love tall

flowers," he thought. "Delphiniums—lupins"—and he suddenly thought of Magdalen Tower on a May morning —beauty rising from the ground, soaring upwards, lifting the heart with it. He thought of Veronica. Strange that he could now think of her as of the flower and the tower, without pain or desire, content to know that, like them, she was in the world!

He rolled over on to his side and looked down the valley. He was learning the names of the hills—Whernside, Hernside, Scarside—Whernsid', Hernsid', and Scarsid' in the local speech—and all the long chain running up to the humped purple shoulder of Penyghent. He could see the tops of the trees that marked the line of the river, and the slopes beyond, crossed by stone walls and dotted with sheep. He could see away to the right the purple heather of Swath Moor, above which a hawk was always hovering.

"A beautiful world," he thought. "I can't believe that nobody made it." The conviction was growing in his mind that there must be Some One behind so much beauty. He put out a hand and drew a spike of the loosestrife towards him, gently, so as not to break the stalk. The detailed perfection of it smote him like the great art of a great artist. He let it sway back into its place and lay still, his eyes half closed, the sun on his face. Peace sank down upon his spirit. He was dimly aware of purpose and design under the apparent inconsistencies of life. Perhaps, after all, it was no formless flood, but a river running to the sea. He sat up and looked at his watch. The hour was nearly at an end. He got up, knocked out his pipe, and walked back to the quarry.

VI

In a village of Wensleydale, in the garden of his mother's house, John Caldicott sat reading a letter. *Country Life,* the *Church Times,* and an old leather-bound copy of "Guy Mannering" lay unheeded on the grass beside his chair. The letter was written on three sheets of paper in a neat, undeveloped handwriting. Caldicott read it through, frowning as he read. He let it fall on his knee and leaned back, looking at the sky through the boughs of an apple tree. Already the green apples were swelling. In a few weeks they would have grown mellow and round and sweet, and there would be an end of another summer. He picked up the letter and glanced again at the last paragraph:

I know what you will think about this—Legard wrote. —I hope you will believe me when I say that there is nothing I mind more. You have always been so good to me, and I have been so happy at St. Paul's. I do want you to understand that I am not doing this because of any sort of temporary dissatisfaction or feeling of restlessness. It's simply that I feel the need of a stricter discipline and more uniformity. I do hope that this need not mean that we shall be entirely cut off from one another—I should so much like to come and see you sometimes if I may. I have arranged to have instruction in the Faith from a priest living near my own home. I don't quite know what I shall do after that, but I hope not to lose sight of you entirely, and I shall always be grateful for your kindness.

Caldicott let the letter fall again. It fluttered from his knee to the grass.

"Impatience!" he thought. "Always impatience! After a certain number of years, a period of restlessness sets in, they find the Church isn't perfect, and they rush off to find something that is. Impatience is the greatest stumblingblock to reunion. No idea of waiting, of doing their best for their Church, of leavening the masses of ignorance and indifference."

His heavy face was folded into lines of sadness. Who should blame them? Certainly not John Caldicott, who in his hot youth had met and overcome his own impatience, who was inured to discouragement and looked for nothing else, who expected only the smallest results of his labours, if any at all. The processes of God were slow. He knew that he in his lifetime would reap little of what he had sown. He would never see the reunion of Christendom. He would never see the conversion of England to his own or to any other faith. The Roman Catholics prayed daily for that conversion. Well, let them. At least, they cared enough to take the trouble. Let them convert England if they could. Let them convert the thousands who had no faith at all—the sluggish, the careless, the indifferent, the sinners—but for those who were converted, those who understood the grace of the Sacraments, for them to leave their own Church was a defection, a shirking of responsibility. It was getting out of a mess and leaving other people in it. It was their duty to stay in their own Church and to hand on the torch which had never been allowed to fall. For, after all, it had been handed on through the upheaval of the Reformation, through the days of the Smithfield fires, through the gathering darkness of Puritanism, through the living death of the eighteenth century.

Through all the doubts and persecutions, the chaos and the disturbances, and the more fatal apathy and materialism, the Catholic Faith had survived in the English Church. There were always some who had patience.

Caldicott reached down a hand for *Country Life,* but although he opened it, he did not at once begin to read it. He had few friends and few intimate relationships. He was fond of Legard. It was a genuine feeling of affection, natural in a man of his character, for one who depended on him and admired him. He had domineered over Legard and worked him hard, but he had shown him endless small kindnesses; he had treated him rather like a son or a younger brother. He had not so many ties of affection that he could afford to have one broken. He would miss Legard. He felt suddenly old and rather lonely. Then something like a grim smile crossed his face.

"If I'd known he wanted a stricter discipline," he reflected, "I might have been able to do something about it."

He got up and went into the house to read to his mother. She was an old lady of eighty-three, much like him in feature and disposition. He had the strong affection for her of a man for whom no other woman had any importance.

"I sha'n't have her more than a year or two longer," he thought, as he looked about for the book he was reading to her. He suddenly saw himself getting nearer to a lonely old age. Characteristically he did not turn away from the thought, but looked steadily at the prospect before him. God would be with him, and this life was no more than a period of probation. He found the book and went upstairs.

VII

Clement was walking along the hills above Swath Moor late on a Saturday afternoon in September. Far off on the opposite side of the valley he could see the chimneys of the Gardale quarry and the white scar of the quarry face. Penyghent was behind him, a little to the left, the crest capped in clouds. The air was still, the distances remote. The sunlight had the quality of autumn; it was pale and soft without ardour. The shadows were blue and purple, with an extraordinary depth of colour. The berries were red on the rowan trees, and the bracken was turning.

Clement felt the silence of the countryside. He had met no one since he crossed the stepping-stones above the force and climbed the bridle track over Swath Moor. He was too high up now even to hear the sound of the shallow river tumbling over the stones. A rabbit popped out of the bracken and scuttled across in front of his feet.

"How Mary would love it here!" he thought. He wondered whether Joyce would come to him after the winter and bring the children. Was it fair to ask her? It would mean life in a workman's cottage on a workman's wage. Probably, if they stopped on, it would mean the National School for Mary and Michael. "Why not?" he thought. "It might be a better beginning than any other. They would grow up less secluded, less part of a sheltered class. I'm not sure it wouldn't be a good thing for every child in the country to go to the same schools—up to fourteen, anyhow. Let them all get used to one another before they

come to the self-conscious age, and it wouldn't matter what else they learnt. Our contacts and relationships with other people are the really interesting things in our lives.

"How extraordinarily little we know about one another, if you come to think of it. I couldn't say I knew Joyce. I don't know a quarter of her. Whole pieces of her are unexplored country. I hardly ever knew what Mary was thinking. Even when you've lived with any one for some time, you are continually finding out new things about them, things you didn't guess—things they don't know themselves, perhaps. All our relationships with other people are voyages of discovery." And suddenly he thought, "Is there a greatest discovery of all—is that God? Is that what we are here for—to explore and find Him?"

At the thought a kind of excitement filled him, as though he were on the verge of seeing something.

"Could it be like a friendship? Sometimes you meet some one and like them awfully. You get a definite idea of them in your mind. You think they are like that, and like them for being like that. Then they do something different from the idea, and you're annoyed; perhaps at the time you think you don't like them—but if you do, if the liking's real, that feeling goes, and the idea of them goes too or alters. You are beginning to find out a little what they really are like, and you like them without the idea between you and them. You start out on the voyage of discovery.

"When I was a priest, I thought I knew God. How could I? I didn't think I knew Joyce. Then, when I began to find out I didn't know Him, I thought He wasn't there. Wasn't that rather absurd?—But we're all like that. We

know doctors don't know all about medicine, and we know musicians haven't finished finding out all about music, and we know scientists haven't come to the end of scientific discoveries, but we calmly expect to know all about God, who, if He does exist, must be Infinite—far greater than music or medicine or science; and isn't it better like that? What's the good of anything in life that isn't exploring? If you think of a small child, it's doing nothing else all the time—tasting, touching, trying to reach, trying to find out." And suddenly he remembered: "Except ye become as a little child, ye cannot enter into the Kingdom of Heaven." Was that what Christ meant? To look at everything, not thinking you knew, but trying to find out? Wasn't it the only possible way to look at anything, especially in a world of beginnings? "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." Did that mean the same? Were "the meek" those who didn't think they knew?—for if you thought you knew, you went about in blinkers. Only if you were willing to discover it could you inherit the earth.

To Clement that thought was in itself a discovery, radiating light in the dark places of his mind. He had thought that his faith was at an end, but faith could have no end. He had thought that death was the end of life, but life could have no end. He thought of what Veronica had said to him in the train, of Drake and his companions setting out for the end of the world, going on day by day, expecting to find the end, and there was no end—only a coming back to the beginning. "I am Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End." He had said that to build the Ship of Truth was to go upon a lonely journey, leaving

all familiar things; but what if the building of the Ship should bring him back to them? Drake, when he sailed on and on, looking for far Cathay, had found England. Clement wondered if that had been his greatest discovery of all, and if he had seen Devon and wife and home with new eyes.

The sun was setting now behind the shoulder of Scarside. The shadows of the hills stretched across the valley, but the opposite slopes were steeped in unimaginable colour with the reflections of the sunset. The path turned downward towards the valley, and Clement followed it. He passed a farmhouse, where a dog barked at him, coming out of his kennel with a rattle of his chain on the ground. In a field near a farmhouse boy scouts were camping. He could see them cooking something over a fire, and the smell of the wood smoke came to his nostrils. The road wound downward towards the plank bridge by the milldam. The sound of the river was in his ears. He crossed the bridge and began to climb the slope on the far side. The sun had set behind Scarside, the colours had faded from the hills. The sky was a clear green behind the quarry chimneys, the air colder with the chill of coming night. Joy went with Clement like a band playing beside him. He turned in at the doorway of the cottage where he lodged and sat down to tea and ham and eggs in the little lamplit room.

Later in the same evening Clement wanted to read. He had one or two books in his bag upstairs, but he had not looked at them since he came to Gardale. After the long hours of hard work in the open air, he had been content with his pipe and the evening paper. Instinct had kept his

brain idle, as though it had been a battery recharging itself with energy. To-night his mind was active. His old craving returned to him. He wanted to read, it did not much matter what. He wanted images, thoughts, events, put into words. He wanted the contact with other minds, the sense of company which he found in books. He went up the steep, narrow staircase to his bedroom.

It was a small room under the ceiling, with a sloping roof and an uneven floor. The bag was under the bed—an old bulging portmanteau which had been his father's, and whose stained leather sides seemed capable of being swelled out to an almost unlimited capacity. He kept a good many of his possessions in it, for there was only one small cupboard in the room. He dragged it out, grasped it by the handles, and gave it a shake to settle the contents. He had not troubled to light a candle. The room was not dark. There was a full moon in a clear sky. The night was extraordinarily light, the sky full of stars. He opened one side of the portmanteau and thrust his hands in among the handkerchiefs, shoes, crumpled collars, and unrolled socks which were tumbled together in a heap. His hands found the smooth surface and hard corner of a book. He pulled it out. It was a thin, flat book. It must be his copy of "Philip the King, and other Poems", the only book of poetry he had with him. He carried it to the window. Although there was enough light to show him the shapes and positions of the furniture in the room, it was not strong enough to read by. He could only see the printed lines as a blur on the white page. He stood peering at them, holding the book open between his hands. Suddenly, as in the bookshop in Melchester, there was a quickening in his

mind. It was as though a current touched him and ran through him, and at the shock of it a door opened which before had been shut. Something which had been waiting asleep behind the door stirred and woke. He saw dimly faces, figures, scenes; he caught fragments of speech. Words began to spring up and link themselves together. It was his book, his own book which he would write. In that moment he knew that it had always been there behind the door, waiting for him to write it, that when he had written it there would be others behind it, waiting for him. He knew that they had been waiting for him all his life, and that something in him had always known it, and had been waiting for them. He was trembling all over his body and his knees were shaking. He sat down on the bed and leaned back against the wall, looking through the window at the sky and the stars.

In a little while his pulses quieted. He went downstairs, carrying the book in his hand. It was his talisman, the key that had unlocked the door. He went into his sitting room and turned up the lamp. He fetched ink and blotting paper and the big block of thin paper which he used for his letters to Joyce. He knew nothing at all about the methods of writers, and was therefore hampered by no misgivings. He put "Philip the King" down on the table beside him. He wrote across the top of the sheet of paper:

"The Ship of Truth,"
A novel, by Clement Dyson.

Then he began to write the first paragraph. At once a clear picture rose before his mind, words came to him, sentences shaped themselves. He had nothing to do but to write

them. When he had finished the paragraph, he paused and read it through. It was only a brief description of what a man saw before him when he came to a certain corner of a road above Barnsdyke, but already it had life and substance, it seemed to him like the real writing of a real writer. A triumphant certainty spread through all his veins. "It is," he thought. "I can. It's real. I can write it. It is a book. It's real. It's mine."

He went on writing. As he wrote, he felt as though all his pleasures and sorrows and hopes and fears, everything he had seen and done and felt and known, was running through him into his pen. He felt as though there was nothing in his life that would not now find its purpose, nothing that had been given to him that he would not give back again, nothing that was sterile, nothing that would come to an end in him. All his years in the world had fed and nourished this child of his heart. As he wrote, the people in the book came alive in his mind, the story took shape. He saw it unfolding ahead of him, stretching out, fitting in. He saw the characters growing, developing, changing. He wrote fast, but his hand could not keep pace with the story as it tumbled out of him.

When he stopped, it was two o'clock in the morning. He read through the chapter that he had written. To-morrow he would see faults and weaknesses in it, but to-night it had a charm that it would never have for him again. It seemed good to him. He put it away in his writing case and stood up. He was stiff, tired, and desperately hungry. He had a tin of biscuits in the cupboard which he sometimes ate in the evening when he came in from a walk. He fished out the tin and sat eating the biscuits. He turned

out the lamp. It was like midnight feasts in the dormitory at his prep school, eating biscuits by moonlight. He put away the tin and went upstairs to bed, appeased in body and mind.

He undressed slowly, thinking over the next stages of his book. He was very sleepy. He stood for a minute by the window, looking out at the sky. The stars were large and bright, "Stars like globes." In that hour, when he was fresh from creation, he had assurance of a Creator. He did not think, nor argue, nor reason. He did not even question. He saw the sky and the stars and heard the sound of the river. He felt the cool air on his face. He knew that God had made the world as surely as he knew that he was making his book. The knowledge came to him without surprise. Perhaps that too had always been there, waiting for him to find it.

He turned away from the window towards his bed. He was too sleepy for consecutive thought, but gratitude welled up in him, gratitude both for the world and for his own power to create out of that world a small world of his own, inhabited by living people. He got into bed and lay down with his face turned towards the window. In the square of dark sky he could see two stars shining.

As he lay there looking at the stars, there was a movement of his being towards God in worship and thanksgiving. It was involuntary and without words. It was like a plant turning towards the sun. He did not pray, he lay very still. His spirit went out from him towards the Spirit of Which it was begotten, and knew that Spirit Whom he could not apprehend with his mind nor see with the eyes of his body. Without reason, without knowledge,

without proof, he had assurance of God. He turned on his side and went to sleep.

VIII

It was on a morning of November, as he was putting pop-shots into a fall of stones too large to break with the hammer, that Clement heard that one of the directors was coming up that day. He was less interested in the news than in the manipulation of the pop-shots, a job to which he had only lately been promoted. He was not even surprised now that it should be known in the quarry at nine o'clock in the morning that lunch had been ordered for the director at the small hotel at Scattle, five miles away. The news had no doubt come down the railway line from signal box to signal box. Clement had been amazed when he first came to Gardale to find how news travelled over the countryside. When the inspector came to visit the quarry, he came by train to Scattle and took the local taxi or bus. He never gave warning of his visits, but at the quarry it was always known that he was coming long before the ancient Ford, battered but indomitable, appeared on the distant brow of Scarside. In the same way, anything that happened in the morning at the rival quarry at Uphaven, six miles away down the valley, was known at Gardale in the dinner hour.

The man who told Clement the news was also not deeply interested in directors. He went on to tell him that a fox had taken five chickens from Henry Cleaton's farm. Clement fired his pop-shots and began to load the broken stone into the bogey. He was anxious to get in a good

morning's work, for there had been two afternoons that week on which it had been too wet to work. He was learning that really bad weather made a serious decrease in a quarryman's earnings. It was the one drawback to a system of pay which seemed to him otherwise remarkably fair and reasonable. The men, content on the whole with less pay, minded it less than he did. He had kept up a high average after the first week or two, and his savings were growing steadily.

They were not the only thing that was growing. Every evening, when he got back to his rooms, he sat down after his tea to his novel. Page by page, chapter by chapter, he was adding to it slowly, like a man accumulating secret treasure. Sometimes it grew as he was working in the quarry or walking back and forth to his work. On these days he hurried home and swallowed his tea hastily, his fingers itching for the pen. Sometimes he did not think during the day of what he was going to write, and it was only when he was ready to begin, and saw the paper spread out before him, that the next part came to him. Always, as it seemed to him, the book had an independent existence of its own, apart from him. It was less like a book than like a small piece of life that he was permitted to transcribe.

Once, as he was pushing a truck down the line halfway through the morning, it occurred to him to wonder if Baines or Wheatley might be the director coming. The thought startled him. He did not know whether they owned the quarry, nor what their position was with regard to it, nor who the directors were. He had supposed that Baines had forgotten all about him, and had been

inclined to acquiesce, too much occupied with his novel to have his mind free for much constructive thinking about the future. It had only been a vague promise to find him a better job, and he had never built much on it. The weeks in London had inspired him with the conviction that for him, at least, better jobs were unattainable.

When the hooter sounded for the dinner hour, he went into the shelter with the other men. It was too cold now to eat sitting in a field. The men had grown used to him and accepted him, not troubling themselves very much about him. One or two of them were friendly, and exchanged local news with him. Sometimes they talked politics, but they were much less interested in them than the people at Barnsdyke; they preferred local politics. When a General Election was imminent, they went to Conservative, Liberal, and Labour meetings with a fine impartiality, and in the spirit in which they went to village concerts or whist drives. They were more vitally concerned in a quarrel between the church-wardens or in the affairs of the cricket club.

The afternoon was fine, but with a watery sky, and a continual threat of coming rain. Clement was working hard, and the next chapter of his novel had taken possession of his mind. He had forgotten all about the director's visit until he looked up and saw two strangers, a stout man and a slim girl, crossing the quarry floor with the manager and foreman. Wheatley and Daisy! He could hear Wheatley's jolly laugh and loud cheerful voice. He bent over the stones that he was breaking. Wheatley must know from Baines that he was here, and if he did not want to speak to him, Clement was anxious not to force

himself upon his notice. Wheatley was a kind fellow and an old friend of his father's; he might feel uncomfortable if the better job of which Baines had spoken were not forthcoming.

They did not come near him, but crossed over to the Hoffmann kiln and disappeared behind it. Clement filled up the bogey, pushed it down the line to join the others, and returned to break more stone. His mind went back to his novel, and the noise that he was making deafened his ears, so that he did not hear a footstep behind him on the wet limestone floor. It was not until he straightened his back and threw down his hammer that he was aware of Daisy Wheatley watching him from a few yards away.

Daisy had grown bored with the technical discussion and strolled off by herself to look round. As Clement raised his head and she saw his face, she stared at him with incredulous amazement.

"Hulloa!" she said doubtfully. Then, as she grew more sure, "It *is* you, isn't it? I didn't know you were here. How are Mary and Michael?" She came towards him, holding out her hand.

"I'm too dirty." Clement showed his hands covered with lime. "Mary and Michael are very well, thank you. They are with their mother in Liverpool."

"Does Daddy know you're here?"

"I don't know. His partner knows; he gave me the job in August."

"Mr. Baines? He went away for his holiday as soon as we got back, so perhaps he forgot to tell him. Does it matter if I stop and talk to you a minute?" Daisy prepared to sit down on the edge of the empty bogey.

"I shouldn't sit on that, you'll get lime all over your coat."

"It's all right, it will brush off." Daisy sat down and stretched out her slim legs in their ribbed woollen stockings and strong shoes. She thrust her hands deep into the pockets of her leather coat. She was not in the least like Joyce, but something in the shape of her small hat, in the two soft bits of hair showing beneath it, reminded Clement of Joyce. He wanted to get on with his work, and he did not like anything that singled him out from his companions, but he couldn't ask her to go away, or altogether wish her to go. There was always something cordial and friendly about the Wheatley family.

"We heard you'd given up being a clergyman," Daisy said. "I think it's very sporting of you to come here and do this."

"I was very glad to—it was the only thing I could get to do."

"Was it really?" Daisy pondered this as though it were a new idea to her. "Do you like it?"

"Yes, very much, thank you."

"Are you living here? But, of course, you must be."

"Yes, I'm in rooms in the village. I'm hoping I may be able to rent a little cottage soon and have my wife and the children with me."

"Oh!" Daisy said, "Then shall you——" She stopped. She had been going to say, "Shall you go on doing this always?" but she did not like to ask.

"Philip's gone to the London office," she said, "to learn the business from that end. He says he's learnt it from this one. Daddy says he can learn it again when he comes

back. He might be coming up here to the quarries. If he does, I'll come up here with him, and perhaps I can see Mary and Michael?"

"Of course, if they are here. Joyce will be very glad to see you."

Daisy got up from the bogey truck.

"Well, I expect I'd better go now. Good-bye—I'm glad I happened to see you."

"Good-bye." Clement went on filling the empty bogey. Daisy strolled across the quarry floor towards the offices. Her father was standing in the office doorway, talking to the manager. The engine came past them, shunting along the line. Daisy pulled her father's coat sleeve.

"Daddy," she said, as soon as she could make herself heard. "You remember that clergyman, Mr. Dyson, who had lunch with us one day, and his wife, and they had two kids called Mary and Michael, and afterwards we heard he'd gone atheist or something, and kicked out of the Church?"

"Yes; well?"

"Well, he's here now, dressed up like a workman, and breaking stones in the quarry."

IX

"Why on earth didn't you write to me?" Wheatley said.

"I didn't know Mr. Baines hadn't told you, sir. And, anyhow, I thought it was quite likely you wouldn't have a job for me if he had."

"But why didn't you come and see me straight away at

the beginning, when you left Barnsdyke, instead of rushing off to London on a wild-goose chase?"

They had been talking in the manager's office for a quarter of an hour, and Wheatley had elicited a brief account of Clement's adventures.

"I wanted to get away from this part of the world. I made rather a fool of myself altogether about that time."

"Well, you look ten years younger for it. I thought when I saw you in the Victoria that you looked as though all the cares of the world were on your shoulders. Quarrying seems to suit you. Do you find it hard work?"

"I did at first, but now I've got used to it, and I love the country."

"Don't you find it rather monotonous?"

"No, I don't mind that. I think while I'm working——" And as the memory of what he usually thought about came back to him, he smiled.

"I don't suppose you want to go on working here for ever, do you?"

"I shouldn't mind, myself. But I want to be able to keep my wife and children, and make a home for them, if—I mean whether they are living with me or not, I must provide for them—the sort of things they have been accustomed to, if possible."

"Ah—what does your wife say to your turning quarryman?"

"She doesn't know. She only knows I'm working up here at some sort of job."

Wheatley studied the face opposite to him attentively. It had lost the pinched and worried look, it looked much

healthier with the tan of the outdoor life. It did look younger—but now that he came to study it carefully, it also looked older, more stabilized.

"Extraordinarily honest eyes the fellow has," he thought. "He was a nice boy. I always did like him. I felt very sorry for him that time in the Victoria. Queer, how you do feel sorry for parsons—can't feel quite as though they were ordinary men. They've got to be different, poor beggars. An awful profession, being good and showing other people how to be. I don't wonder he jibbed." He said aloud:

"If you don't mind my asking, what made you leave the Church?"

Clement answered slowly:

"A lot of things—but mostly that I had never found out for myself what I believed. I'd only learnt it from other people—and I thought I must find out."

"I thought it might be this upset about the Prayer Book."

"No, that didn't worry me much. It has worried a lot of people, but it didn't worry me particularly."

"A queer chap," Wheatley thought. "Very taking chap, somehow—not a bit like his father—he was the old sort of parson, bullied his parish and kept it in excellent order, played a very good hand at whist, good judge of wine; this fellow is more like his mother. She was a pretty woman, gentle, with those very eyes. He is exactly like her when he smiles. How long has he been in the quarry?—three months; he's stuck it well! I don't believe he more than half wants to go now. He must go, of course. We must get him down at the printing works,

make a proofreader of him. He'll be useful. He's intelligent all right—good education, used to be fond of books too."

"Well," he said, "I think we can find you something better than quarrying—in a week or two, anyhow. I'll write and let you know."

"Thank you very much, sir. I shall be most grateful."

"I'll let you know. The sooner the better, of course, so that you can have your wife and children back."

"Yes, I think so."

He didn't somehow seem very keen about that—looked doubtful, rather sad. Was there something wrong, Wheatley wondered? He tried to recall Joyce more clearly, but could only remember a vague impression of a pretty girl, rather tired-looking, rather quiet. No doubt the whole thing had been a terrible upset for her. Perhaps they had quarrelled over it. Probably she disapproved of her husband leaving the Church. Well, that was delicate ground, anyhow; he couldn't interfere; give him the chance to get a home going, leave the rest to him.

In the car, Wheatley said to Daisy:

"What was Mrs. Dyson like; can you remember?"

"Yes—very married, rather pathetic, rather pretty—nice, but not terribly interesting."

It confirmed his own impression. Poor girl, she probably hadn't been able to make head or tail of the whole business.

Daisy lit a cigarette and settled down more comfortably under the rug.

"Why did he chuck the Church, Daddy?"

"I gather he stopped believing in it."

"Well," said Daisy frankly, "it has got pretty antiquated, hasn't it?"

"I've no doubt it doesn't offer the same up-to-date attractions as a night club or a cinema."

"Don't talk gup, Daddy; you know I didn't mean that. That's like all that stuff in the papers about the present generation, signed by parent of twelve—and you're not a stupid parent."

"Thank you," said Mr. Wheatley meekly.

"I'm serious about this; Philip and I often talk about it."

Wheatley looked at his daughter. She had taken off her hat and thrown it on the floor. The perfection of her fair shingle was a little ruffled, but she had just made up her face again with care. She looked very comfortable in her corner, the fur rug over her knees, the cigarette between her lips. Amazing child! He hadn't known she talked about these things, or even gave them a thought. He hadn't known Philip did, either. What strangers your children were! He said:

"What do you and Philip think about it?"

"We don't quite know what to think. We think it's awfully important, what you believe—but we can't belong to the Church while it's so mixed up with morality."

"That's rather a startling statement."

"Not really. We think they ought to be separate. Much more separate than they are. You see, moral laws are mostly made by people to keep themselves safe. They aren't exactly anything to do with goodness or religion. We think it's all right to punish people for breaking them, but not to call them wicked. Philip worked it out that

morality exists for the general convenience—but it isn't the same as religion or as goodness."

"What are goodness and religion, then, do you think?"

But Daisy couldn't say to him, though she might have said to Philip, what she thought goodness and religion were. She had only a vague idea about them. She thought they were much the same thing. She thought they might be a sort of reflection of Some One who must be God, but whom she couldn't imagine. She thought really that religion might be a kind of loving. She didn't know any more, and wished she did, but no one seemed to be able to tell her. Pamela always went to church, but she was such a kid, thought Daisy, being herself nineteen. Daddy didn't go to church, but Mother did sometimes, though not as regularly as Pamela. Of course, Mother was much more hopelessly pre-war than Daddy, who had moved with the times, so far as that generation could. They were always telling you what you ought to do, that generation, but they weren't any real use to you; they couldn't tell you what you wanted to know. You wanted to know things, really, honestly, not to pretend about them, or to believe what other people said without looking into it. You wanted to be decent, and especially you wanted to be kind and not judge people, because any fool could see that judging was pretty damnable—but sometimes it was awfully difficult. It was all awfully difficult—a puzzling, but very interesting world.

So now Daisy said:

"Oh, I don't know." Then she threw away the end of her cigarette, opened her bag, and put some more lipstick on her mouth. She said, "Well, anyway, you'll find that

poor lamb another nice job, won't you? Daddy, don't let's get home to dinner! Let's stop at a low pub at Skipton and have ham and eggs—do—it's so much more fun!"

X

Joyce was in Liverpool by herself, doing Christmas shopping. She had taken the children out to tea with a friend of her mother's who had a little grandson staying with her, and the maid was going to fetch them home. It was a relief to be able to shop without having to look round every minute to see that Mary wasn't getting lost, and she felt cheerful, although the afternoon was wet and dark. She loved shopping. She had very little money to spend this Christmas, but it was fun spending even a little, when everything in the shops was so bright and attractive looking.

She bought the things for the children's stockings—a sugar pig for each, and four sugar mice, some chocolate frogs wrapped in green paper, a chocolate bell in gold tinfoil, a box of chalks for Mary, a rubber ball for Michael, some flat biscuits with coloured sugar on, some cheap, bright-coloured crackers. The accumulation of so many things made her feel gay and extravagant, but when she came out of the shop on to the muddy pavement she remembered doing the Christmas shopping with Clement last year in Melchester, and sighed. Nothing could be the same this year. Christmas in some one else's house wasn't like Christmas in your own home. It was like all the rest of her life at present. There was a sort of flatness and dreariness about it. She just went on from day to day

looking after the children, helping her mother, doing the shopping, sewing, knitting, playing bezique with her father. None of it had any point.

She stood at the tram stop, waiting for her tram. Her parcels, though not heavy, were bulky and breakable. Her arms ached, and she shifted the parcels. A thin rain began to fall. She put up her umbrella with some difficulty. What was Clem doing now, she wondered? His last two letters had been brief notes, little more than comments on her news, and remarks about the weather, and the look of the country, and messages to the children. He seemed to be getting farther away from her. She could not even imagine him much in his daily life, for she did not know exactly what he was doing. One of the small things that troubled her was that whenever she tried to imagine him at work she always imagined him in clerical clothes, and then remembered that he would not be wearing them. She would reconstruct her imaginary picture with care and pains, but it was never so vivid or spontaneous. This trifling inability caused her distress out of all proportion. It made her feel as though she had lost the old Clement, and did not know the new one.

She got on to her tram and was borne away through the streets. The tram was full, and she was squeezed into a corner near the door, so that she had some difficulty in keeping her parcels safe as the tram jolted and swayed, and her neighbour pressed heavily against her. She slipped a hand into the paper carrier and felt the chocolate frogs to make sure that they were not being broken. No, they seemed to be all right. She leaned back as comfortably as she could against the hard wooden seat.

Suppose she wrote to Clement, not as she had been writing, but a real letter. Suppose she said, "That was a very silly letter I wrote you, and I have been sorry ever since. I don't know if you want to come back to us, but if you do, will you come to us for Christmas? If you don't want to, don't answer, and I shall understand, but if you do want to come, I want to have you."

Suppose she wrote that, and he didn't want to come. Suppose he was really in love with Veronica—then he wouldn't come, and she would be humiliated. She knew he would never come and pretend to her. Suppose he didn't come if she asked him? Her hands tightened on the parcels, her lips and chin stiffened. She was proud, and the thought that her overtures might be rejected was intolerable to her. No, she couldn't do it. He must make the first move. He couldn't expect her to. Then she thought:

"What does it matter, after all? I couldn't be more unhappy than I am now. I would rather know. Besides, it is my fault. He was writing to me just as usual till I wrote him that letter. I dare say I was wrong. I dare say he just admired Veronica Perfect and liked seeing a friend, and didn't really love her. Then it was an insulting letter I wrote him. It's Christmas, and I ought to try to make peace."

So she reasoned, and underneath her heart cried,

"I can't go on. I love him, I love him, and I want him back."

The tram stopped, and one or two more people got in—a woman with parcels, an oldish man carrying a bass, and two girls. The woman, the man and one of the girls found seats. The other girl was standing, holding on to a strap,

when a man at the far end of the car got up and beckoned her to his seat. Joyce saw that it was Clement. The shock of surprise sent all the blood racing through her body. Her heart beat violently, and a sort of mist came over her eyes, so that she could hardly see. It was Clement. He was standing up at the end of the car, holding on to a strap and smiling at a small child who was making friendly advances to him. Evidently he had not seen Joyce. He must have got in at the station, two stops before she had. She was glad that he had not seen her. She shrank back behind her neighbour, and devoured her husband with her eyes.

He looked very well. She thought he had grown broader in the shoulders and taller, or perhaps he stooped less. He was wearing the brown overcoat which he had bought when he went into mufti in the spring, and a rather battered soft hat with the ribbon frayed at the end. He had made a small cut on his chin when he shaved that morning. He looked different, and yet just the same, smiling at the small child just as he always had, and his eyes the same, bright, clear, quick-glancing. She had written to her greatest friend when they were engaged to tell her what beautiful eyes he had. He wasn't looking at the small child now. He was looking at the notices on the side of the tram, thinking—she knew how his eyes moved when thoughts were going round in his head. What was he thinking about? About her? He must be coming to see her—or was he thinking those funny thoughts of his about life, about the world, about what was wrong with things, about how to put them right, about God? She wondered how he felt now about religion. She didn't care as

long as he was happy, and he did look happy, much happier. Well, anyhow, she would have seen him.

The stop after the next was the one nearest to her mother's house. Mechanically she secured her parcels. He would get out there too, of course, and they would meet. They would have half a mile to walk together. She had often thought it a long half-mile with Mary, tired, struggling along at her side, but now she wished it was longer. The tram stopped and she got up, her knees trembling. He was coming down the tram. He saw her, and his face lit up unmistakably. They both smiled. She got off the tram. He was behind her, collecting his bag from the outside platform. She heard him say good night to the conductor. They were standing together on the pavement. The tram went on and left them.

He said, "Joyce! How are you? Give me those," and tried to take the parcels from her.

She said, "No, don't, Clem, they're breakable—and you've got your bag. I can manage them, they're quite light. I didn't know you were coming."

"Some of those small ones will go in my pockets."

He put his bag down on the pavement and began to fill his pockets with her smaller parcels.

She said, "Oh, don't squash that one; it's a chocolate bell," and she laughed, half hysterically, at nothing. It all seemed unexpectedly familiar.

He tucked her other parcel under his arm, and picked up his bag.

"Now we're ready."

They crossed the road and turned into a side street.

"Joyce, do you mind my coming? Because if you do, if you would rather I didn't bother you, I can go back by the train after eight. I nearly wrote to ask you if I might come—but it's so much easier to say things talking. Do you mind?"

"No, I'm glad. I wanted to write, too, but I'm never good at saying anything in a letter." Her lip trembled suddenly. She said in an unsteady voice, "I'm sorry, Clem,—sorry I wrote that horrid letter. I've been sorry all the time."

"Don't!" he said. "I'm the one to be sorry. You've had a rotten time."

She was crying quietly and couldn't speak. He disengaged his hand somehow from the parcels, and slipped it through her arm.

"I've got a job now, anyhow," he said. "You remember Wheatley—he's given me a job in the printing works at five hundred a year for a start—so you can have a little house of your own, and you won't be quite so hard up, and—I don't know. I came to ask if we could all live together again—but it's for you to say. If you'd rather not, I'll find a little house for you and the children, wherever you like, near your mother perhaps."

He tried to keep the eagerness out of his voice. It wasn't fair to urge her. She must feel absolutely free to do as she liked. Something of the same feeling made her check her tears and steady her voice.

"Clem—I know you won't pretend to me. Tell me honestly—do you want us back?"

"Awfully." His hand pressed her arm. "But I want

you to do as you feel—and I want to tell you this. You were right in a way about Veronica. I didn't realize it until I got your letter, but I did think I was in love with her. I know now that I wasn't—not really. She was very kind to me; I liked talking to her, and I missed you dreadfully, and I was half crazy. It was an idiotic time altogether, and I'm ashamed of it. It was like a bit of my life when I was some one else. I've tried to tell you exactly what happened, and you must do what you feel like. I shall quite understand whichever way you decide."

They walked on for a minute in silence. Then Joyce said quietly:

"I don't think I quite understand, but I believe you. I always should feel I could believe you, whatever you said. Will you tell me—are you at all in love with Veronica now?"

"No," he said. "I hardly ever think about her. If I do, I don't think about her as if she had anything to do with me. There's another thing I would like to tell you. All the time in London, when I did think I loved her, I never stopped thinking about you and the children and looking forward to the time when we should all be together again. I never stopped missing you. I can't explain how it was like that, but it was. Now you know how it all happened, could you bear to have me back again?"

Joyce's tears began to flow again. She said, "Oh, Clem, I don't care. I want you back. Nothing else matters, as long as you want it too. We do belong. Let's all be together again."

XI

Late in the evening, when the older couple had gone to bed, Joyce and Clement sat together by the sitting-room fire. Clement had a dispatch case by his side which he had brought down from his room after supper. He opened it and took out a pile of foolscap, covered with his handwriting.

"Look here, Joyce—I'm writing a book. I've done more than half. I haven't told any one about it yet. I thought perhaps you'd like to have a look at the beginning."

"Oh, Clem, how thrilling!" Joyce received the manuscript on to her knee. "My dear, how wonderful of you! What is it about?"

"It's about a young man working in a mill at Barnsdyke, and what he thought about things."

"I always thought you might do something like this." Joyce read the first paragraph. "Why, it's real, Clem! It begins exactly like a published book by somebody very good."

She saw his whole face light up with pleasure at the first outside recognition, the first praise ever bestowed upon his child. She was happy because he was pleased by her praise, and proud to show her the book. She turned back to the title page.

" 'The Ship of Truth.' I like the name."

"Do you?" he said. "It's out of my favourite poem."

She turned over the sheets of manuscript in her lap.

"Clem—how do you feel now about religion? Are you still worried about it?"

He was sitting on the hearthrug, his knees up to his chin, his hands clasped in front of them. He looked into the fire.

"No, I don't worry now, exactly. You see, I'm sure."

"Sure of what?"

"Sure that God exists—and that He made the world—and that whether they know it or not, most of the world worship Him."

"Then are you coming back into the Church?"

"I don't know yet. I hope so, but you see I'm only at the beginning. I think perhaps religion in this life can't be anything but beginning. I've discovered that it's a kind of exploring—and I expect the Church is really a beginning, a kind of exploring. I expect it's the same with all religions—only the trouble is that people get to think of them as an end, and, of course, they can't be. This is only what I think, of course, but I think religion is a voyage of discovery. Some people band themselves together in companies to go on the voyage, and some go alone. I think that to be banded together in a National Church would be the best and happiest and most friendly way to go, but only as long as the Church was moving, as long as it was willing to go on with the voyage. Directly it stopped trying to discover, you would have to leave it and go alone—because it's the discovery that matters. The Church or any other religion is only a ship to take you there—and every one must choose their own way of going."

Joyce was watching his face as he looked into the fire.

"Don't you think the Church is moving—trying to discover?"

"The Church of England? Yes, I do. I think it moves very, very slowly, and rather unwillingly, and not always in the same direction, but I do think it does move. I don't think the Roman Church does. It's like a great glorious Spanish galleon, moored in a harbour, and it says to people going past, 'You'll be safe here—no storms and rocks and dangers—come inside.' That's why I couldn't ever belong to it. It's not exploring."

Joyce looked down at the manuscript in her lap.

"I'm not exploring either—except when I try to understand what you say to me, and I do try to think about things, because the children ask so many questions. But I'm stupid, Clem. You won't have to mind."

"You're not stupid. You probably know by instinct the things I've taken years to find out. I think probably most people know them. I expect some people explore with their intellects and some with their feelings—and some know they are exploring and others don't—but they are all doing the same thing really."

"Well, perhaps," Joyce said doubtfully. She did not think that she herself explored much. Certainly she didn't with her intellect, because she hadn't one. About her feelings, she didn't know. Perhaps she might be one of the people who explored without knowing. She hadn't really much time, but when Mary was always asking the why and wherefore of things, she did stop and try and think. She felt responsible, and very anxious that the answers she gave her should be true and satisfying, as far as possible. Like all parents, she hoped that her children would be wiser, happier, and better than she was. Perhaps in that looking forward into the future there was a kind

of exploring. She thought now of the present and was content.

"Must you really go by that early train in the morning, Clem?"

"Yes, I mustn't be late."

"But you'll come back for Christmas?"

"Yes, if your mother will have me. I'll be here as early as I can on Christmas Eve—I expect about tea time. Then as soon as we can find a house, we'll get into it and settle down. I've been looking at one or two. A modern one, I think, don't you, easy to work?"

"Yes, if we can, and not too far from the works, so that you will get home in decent time in the evenings."

"I've often thought what fun it would be to be one of the people going to work in the daytime and coming home at night."

"Yes, I know. It will be jolly to have a little house that I can manage easily, so that I can get everything finished in good time, and be all ready to spend the evening with you."

"It's funny, isn't it, we don't know that kind of life a bit. We've been married five years, and got two children, and it will be like starting all over again."

"Yes," said Joyce, smiling. "You'll like that—more exploring, only exploring very ordinary things."

"Well, they are the ones most worth discovering."

"I hope you'll always think that," Joyce said suddenly.

"Why?"

"Because I'm very ordinary, and I don't think you are."

"What rot!" he said. "You're not ordinary at all. You

are what Mary calls 'absolutely spesshul.'" They both laughed, and he added, "Besides, there isn't such a thing as an ordinary person."

"Perhaps not," Joyce thought. "But I know what I mean, all the same—some people are more ordinary than others, and I'm one of those, and you're one of the others, so I hope I shall never bore you—but I love you, and I've got you back, and, just now, that's all that matters."

XII

Veronica's daughter was born unexpectedly in January, early on a Friday morning.

"Friday's child is loving and giving," the nurse said.

"Like her father," Rodney observed.

"Well, I don't know, Mr. Perfect; she's the image of her mother."

"Is she?" Rodney looked doubtfully at his daughter. "Well, she might be some day; she's not like anything on earth at the moment, is she?"

"She's an unusually pretty little baby," the nurse said, indignant, but not very, because she liked Rodney, and because he was only saying what fathers always thought it proper to say. She knew that he was really pleased.

Rodney was pleased, but as he sat in the library on Sunday evening, writing to various relations, he could not help feeling that he would have been more pleased if it had been a son. Three nights ago he had been walking up and down the same room, twenty steps from the hearth to the bookcase and twenty back again, swearing that he didn't care if it was a boy or a girl, didn't care if it lived

or died, so long as it was soon over and Nicky all right. But that was three nights ago. He'd been to the office yesterday, he'd been playing golf this afternoon. He had just been upstairs and seen Nicky having tea and looking very much like herself. He was experiencing a reaction from the long months of special feeling, months in which he had been rather more considerate, rather more unselfish, rather less confident than was natural to him. He had had some queer feelings during those months, feelings of awe and wonder, feelings of fear and uncertainty. On Thursday night he had been afraid; he had been ashamed of himself for not being somehow different. He had been very near praying. Now he felt unconsciously that it was time to get back to his normal state of cheerful materialism. Life was a jolly, ordinary business, in which you enjoyed yourself as much as you could, did a certain amount of quite interesting work, and observed certain decencies that were expected of you. If lately he had had a glimpse of it as something more, something miraculous and mysterious, if he had had a vision of the eternal wonder of the word made flesh, of a spirit arriving out of the darkness, he hastily turned his head away from it. He was matter of fact and humorous with his friends about his new baby; he had a fit of being unusually particular about his food and harassing the cook with messages; he smoked and drank rather more than usual. He wished Nicky was up and quite all right again, so that they could go off somewhere together for a change—or he almost wished he could go off for a holiday by himself. Yet at the same time he was genuinely pleased about the baby and proud of his fatherhood. He felt that he had

achieved something—though he would have felt it a little more of an achievement if it had been a son.

Veronica lay upstairs in the firelight, content. Presently the nurse brought the baby and laid her by her for a few moments on the bed. Veronica touched the dark head and laughed. It was like a little bird! It made tiny movements of its features—blinking its eyes, opening its mouth. It was altogether engaging and absurd. And it was a person! It had been part of her, and now it was a separate person, by itself—complete. It would do things and think about things, and though she would sometimes know what it was doing, she would never quite know what it was thinking. Already it must have started off by itself—it must be getting impressions of things, it could feel warm, it could feel hungry. All the things that she had looked at and tasted and tried, it would look at and taste and try for itself all over again. She would see it doing it, but she wouldn't know exactly how it felt about them, even if it tried to tell her. It was a stranger. She wondered if it felt lonely or excited, lying there on the bed at the beginning of things, making those ridiculous little movements, as though already it wanted to make itself felt. Funny little thing, starting off alone! And she thought of the Ship of Truth. It would make one, she supposed, out of its own thoughts and feelings, out of what it saw and heard and smelt and touched, out of something that made it a person working on those things, something that was its very own, itself. She wouldn't be able to help very much. All she could do was not to hinder it, and she would try to do that. Most people could manage a Ship of Truth for themselves, if they weren't hindered.

She thought about Clement. He had written to Rodney to say that he had got a job, was getting a house, and hoped soon to remove his furniture. He was all right again, she supposed, and getting on better. She was glad; she had always liked him. She would like him to see the baby; he would be interested, he would understand what an extraordinary thing it was to see a small creature like that beginning its adventures. Queer that night in London when he'd come and told her he loved her—but he didn't really, he was only rather off his head. He liked her, of course.

"We rather like thinking about the same things," she thought. "Our minds can touch a bit more than most people's—more than mine and Rodney's, in some ways. Odd that I love Rodney and not him. Something must touch in Rodney and me that isn't our minds—something else besides our bodies; that's only part of it. It's what they call personality perhaps—the thing that makes me Veronica and him Rodney—the part of us that I think is going to last."

The nurse came back again.

"There now, it's just on six," she said. "Baby must go back into her cot. She goes in at six."

"She's very well drilled, isn't she, nurse?"

"It's the only thing—to get them into regular ways from the very beginning. You'll find it best to make rules and keep to them. Baby goes into her cot at such a time, whoever comes to see her, and she stays there, whoever wants to take her out."

"Well, I hope she won't mind."

"Why ever should she? She'll be all the better for it.

The happiest children are always the best brought up—I'm sure you'll bring her up well."

"I sha'n't bring her up very much at all," said Veronica drowsily.

Nurse was not listening to her.

"Well, you have a sleep now," she said. She carried off the baby into the next room.

Veronica looked at the firelight flickering on the ceiling.

"All right, baby," she thought sleepily. "You'll have to be brought up a bit, of course. But I shall always remember you are a person as much as me. You shall build your own ship, and I won't interfere with you."

XIII

Legard was in Madeira with his father and mother, staying in a hotel above the sea. He was sitting on the veranda of the hotel, writing a letter on a pad on his knee to Father Hobart, from whom he had received instruction, and by whom he had been admitted at Christmas into the Roman Church.

"It is so wonderful here," he wrote, "to see the poor people come into the churches just as they are on their way home from the day's work or in the lunch hour. You never go in without seeing one or two kneeling there, and the children are always in and out. I hope some day we shall see that in England."

Mrs. Legard was reading a copy of the *Church Times* which had been sent out to her. She took a great interest in Church matters. She did not altogether approve of the

Church Times, which was too much inclined to ritual and socialism, but her father had always taken it, and she always did.

"Listen to this, Bernard," she said to her husband. She read him an account of a long dispute about the reserved Sacrament between the vicar of a well-known church and the bishop of his diocese. A year ago she would have read it to her son, although he would probably have disagreed with her about it, but now that the Jesuits had got hold of the poor boy, with their nasty, deceitful ways, he naturally would not be interested. She had to read out the titbits of ecclesiastical news to her husband, who was not interested either, but pretended to be, because he liked a quiet life.

"If I had been the bishop," she concluded vigorously, "I should have sent that impertinent young man out of the diocese."

"I don't think they can do that," old Legard murmured pacifically—"not just for disagreeing with them, I mean. Can they, Jim?"

"No," Legard answered.

"Thank heaven, I'm out of it!" he thought, "out of all the muddle and uncertainty, and disputes and disagreements, the half-beliefs, the lassitude, the divisions."

He said to his mother:

"Don't you think it's wonderful to see the people in the churches here—the way they drop in all day long, and sit or kneel down for a few minutes?"

Mrs. Legard replied with decision.

"So far as I can see, it's all they do do. When they aren't dropping into the churches, they are leaning against

the walls outside. I suppose their legs must get tired of standing."

"There's an extraordinary atmosphere of reverence in the churches. You must have noticed it."

"I noticed more dirt than anything else. I shouldn't think the Cathedral has been cleaned since it was built."

Legard sighed.

"Come for a stroll, Jim." Old Legard got up and reached for his stick.

They sauntered down to the town together, walking on the shady side of the street. Bullock carts creaked by them in the lazy warmth. Great trees of wistaria were flowering in the courtyards and against the walls of the houses. The doorways of the shops were hung with brilliant shawls and native headdresses. Old Mr. Legard said:

"I've been thinking that when I get back I sha'n't have the peas sown in the same place as last year. I don't think they got enough sun there; the orchard cuts it off a good deal. I've a good mind to try them on the far side, behind the fernery."

Legard was still ruffled by the encounter with his mother. Father Hobart had pointed out to him that it was always possible that through him the rest of his family might be drawn into the true Church. So far the prospect seemed rather far off. He said:

"Don't you think, Dad, that there is an extraordinary difference between the churches here and the churches in England?"

"Eh? The churches? Yes, my dear, of course—but one doesn't expect to find things the same abroad. I don't like

the way they do the potatoes—I haven't had a plain, decently cooked potato since I came."

They strolled a little farther into the town.

"I think I shall go back now and see how your mother's getting on," old Legard said contentedly.

"I'll be back to lunch."

Jim Legard watched his father strolling away—grey suit, old grey head, Panama hat, pipe, walking stick—so tolerant, so good-tempered, so kind—and a heretic, quite impervious to his hints and suggestions, quite outside the fold. He went up the steps into the Cathedral.

He kneeled down before a side altar above which was a coloured image of St. Theresa. A man and a woman were also kneeling there. Close to the image on a nail in the wall hung a little bunch of wax arms and legs, and even ears and noses, like a collection of fragments broken off from different-sized dolls. Legard knew that they were put there by the relations and friends of those who were suffering in a limb, an ear, or a nose, so that St. Theresa might keep the sufferer in mind and know exactly what to intercede for. He was touched by the naïve simplicity of such faith.

"A great Church," he thought. "A great tradition, like an immense army spreading all over the world. This is what I wanted—unity, certainty—the true Faith."

He began to pray for the conversion of his father and mother and others of his family. After struggling for a moment with a sense of impertinence, he prayed for the conversion of Caldicott. The woman kneeling by him got up and shuffled away down the aisle. Two little barefooted

boys who were scampering about the church came up and stood behind him, waiting to beg. They had to wait so long that they grew tired of it and moved away, but Legard still knelt there, not so much praying as rejoicing in his new-found security.

XIV

Clement came back again to Barnsdyke on an afternoon in March. As he got off the bus in the familiar winding street and stood between the yellowish-grey houses, it seemed to him as though he had been away for ten or twenty years instead of one. Then, as he walked up the street, the familiar things grew upon him, and he lost his sense of strangeness. As he passed the ginnel leading to the vicarage, he felt as though it would be natural to turn down it. Some one else lived in the vicarage now and ministered in the church. He turned off from the street and began to climb the hillside towards the Grange. The moving men would have been there all the morning; probably they would have got most of the things in by the time he arrived, but he must see that they had taken everything, and must thank any one who had been helping. He did not know if the Perfects were at home, but he thought not. He had written to ask if he might send for his furniture, and Rodney had answered from the London flat.

He rang the bell and explained what he had come for. He was taken into the courtyard behind the house, where the furniture was being loaded. The men had got on well, the van was nearly full. Only a few pieces of his furniture

were still standing about, with the forlorn, detached look of property in a removal.

He was watching Joyce's wardrobe being loaded into the van when a maid came out to him. Mrs. Perfect had sent to say would he go in and have some tea when he had finished? He thanked the maid and said that he would come. He would be glad to see her again. He had heard about her baby; he hoped she was pleased. Joyce had written to her, and had had a letter, a friendly letter, mostly about the baby. Joyce had shown it to him without saying much about it, but he knew that she had felt differently about Veronica since the baby came. He was quite right, she did. She felt as though the baby would tie Veronica firmly to Rodney, and would absorb all her attention. The coming of the baby partly changed Joyce's idea of Veronica as a dangerously attractive woman into an idea of her as a wife and mother. Besides, Joyce felt that she had been unfair. She had always thought of Veronica as the sort of person who wouldn't have children, and now Veronica had one. Probably, Joyce thought, it was quite a nice little girl, and whenever she thought this, she looked at Michael with pride.

Rodney had just come back from the dye works as Clement came in. He was shedding his coat in the hall.

"Hulloa!" he said. "How are you? Got all your things on board? That's right. You must be cold after standing about in this wind all the afternoon. Come in and have some tea. Nicky!"

Her voice came through the open door of the library.

"Hulloa, Rodney—tea's in here."

Extraordinary to see her again without disturbance, only with the same pleasure with which one might see any beautiful thing. She was sitting at the fire behind the tea table. She shook hands with him, and said:

"How are you? You are cold! Pull up that big chair, won't you. Rodney, there are some hot scones in the hearth—will you pick up the dish?"

He had the same feeling that he had had when he got off the bus, of things being both familiar and strange. He asked after the baby.

"Oh, she's flourishing, thank you. I told nurse to bring her down afterwards. I thought you'd like to see her."

"That's all my eye," Rodney observed. "Nobody really wants to see a six-weeks-old child belonging to somebody else. It's only her mother wants to show her off."

"What about her father? Didn't you fetch her downstairs out of bed at nine o'clock of night to show her to Jerry?"

"That was only because nurse said I wasn't to. I am her father, after all. I have to assert myself."

"What have you called her?" Clement asked.

"Tamsine Ann—do you like it?"

"You must be a connoisseur of babies' names," Rodney observed cheerfully. "It was a pity she didn't come along last year, and then you could have christened her."

They all laughed.

"Now tell us about your new house," Veronica said.

While he was talking about his new house, and about his new job, she looked at him and thought that he seemed much happier, more established and less bewildered. "More of a person altogether," she said to herself. It

seemed to her a long time since he had come to see them so often in the London flat.

The nurse brought the baby down and gave her to Veronica.

"Queer little object, isn't she?" Rodney remarked with obvious pride in her. He had almost forgotten now that he had wanted a boy.

To Clement the baby seemed incredible—a funny little thing, nicely pink, with a dark, downy head, and very dark blue eyes.

"I must remember what she looks like, so as to be able to tell Joyce about her."

"I hope she'll come over and see her one day when you're settled—or I'll bring Tamsine over to call."

A maid came in to fetch Rodney to the telephone. Veronica laid the baby on a cushion on the hearthrug.

"Well," she said. "How are things going—what about the Ship of Truth? Have you found it?"

"I'm beginning to find it."

"That's something, isn't it?"

"Yes, it is. I'm not sure—I don't think it can be more than beginning, now, I mean, here."

"No, I expect not."

They were silent for a minute. The baby made tiny noises from the hearthrug. Veronica looked at Clement and thought of their last extraordinary meeting, of which she had no doubt that she now remembered so much more than he did. Well, all the better. It struck her that his wasn't a life entirely made up of personal relationships; they weren't necessarily the most important things in it. He was affectionate, friendly, kind, but she detected

a hidden streak of solitariness in him. In his pursuit of his own truth there was something almost ruthless. He would suffer, if necessary, for his conscience's sake, but it wouldn't deter him that other people would have to suffer too. An honesty so austere was very nearly selfish. Veronica suddenly perceived the whole of human character as a matter of proportion. A little more of this virtue apparently meant a little less of that. "But how dull," she thought, "if we were all even."

He said suddenly, "Do you remember talking to me that day in the train about Drake setting out to find the end of the world? Do you remember saying that it would be like that setting out to build the Ship of Truth?"

"Yes," she nodded.

"Well, Drake came back to the same things in the end—the ordinary things he had known before he started. But I expect they looked different, and I think he must have felt as though he was discovering them again—and probably that's what happens. I think I am coming back to them."

She nodded. "Yes, I see."

The old pleasure in talking to her revived. He knew that he would always have a special feeling for her, but he also knew now that her life and his would be things apart. He saw her belonging to Rodney and his child, as clearly as he felt himself belonging to Joyce and Mary and Michael. He said suddenly:

"I'm writing a book."

She smiled. "Really? How thrilling! What sort of book?"

"A novel—called 'The Ship of Truth', about a man working in a mill in a place like Barnsdyke."

"Shall you have it published?"

"I shall try."

"Oh, I hope it will be. I should like to read it."

Rodney came back into the room.

"It was the garage about the car," he said. "The telephone was so bad, I couldn't make head or tail of it. I'll run you into Netherfield when you go, Dyson, and then I can see them about it."

After they had gone, Veronica sat on by the fire, thinking.

"I am glad he feels better about things," she thought. "I wonder what his book is like—it will be awfully interesting to read it; suppose Rodney wrote a book. How funny! I simply can't imagine it. And I like him better for being that sort of person, so that I can't imagine it. I don't know why. I suppose it is because it is part of him. If you like any one very much, everything about them, even the things they aren't or can't do, seem to make you like them more." She looked down at her daughter lying on the hearthrug. "What do you think about it, Tamsine, I wonder?"

But Tamsine had found out the shine of the firelight on the brass fender, and did not answer her mother, being absorbed already in her own discoveries.

XV

On a Saturday afternoon in May, Clement finished his novel. He wrote the last words across the page halfway down and looked at the empty half sheet below them.

"That's that," he murmured. He felt a thrill of tri-

umph and completion. He read the last paragraph again, altered a mistake in it, and laid down his pen.

A loneliness came over him like the loneliness after parting from a friend. He knew that it would never again be quite so much his book as it had been while he was writing it. He saw it in his mind, printed, bound, published, displayed in shop windows and in libraries, a book with his name on it—but the book that he saw was a stranger.

He put away the manuscript in a case. On Monday he must see about getting it typed. Just as the book had grown like a plant with a separate, vigorous life of its own, so it had brought with it the conviction that it was meant to live, that it could not stop at the writing, but must go on, must be typed and corrected and sent to publishers, and finally accepted and printed and published. Clement had no very exalted idea of its merits, but this conviction had nothing to do with his sober judgment. It was like his belief in his own survival. He often said to Joyce and to himself that probably no one would publish the book, but he didn't believe it, not because he thought it so good, but because he felt it so alive that it must push its way out into the world.

He looked out of the window. The house was on the edge of the county, an outpost of the town's invasions. There were other new houses crowding up behind it, but in front the road was not yet made, and on the other side of the road was a hedge and a field where the grass was growing for hay. There was a footpath across the field, leading to a patch of wood at the corner. Clement saw Joyce coming across the footpath from the wood. Michael

was stumping along beside her. He had begun to change lately from a baby to a little boy. He had acquired a swaggering, sturdy gait, and a loud voice out of all proportion to his size. Mary was running on ahead, her arms full of bluebells and wood anemones.

Clement opened the drawer in his desk where he kept his manuscript. He laid it in its place regretfully, feeling sorry that there was no more of it to write. As he was going to shut the drawer, his eye fell on a pile of unused foolscap in the corner—virgin, white, inviting. He began to think what he should write next. Something stirred in his mind, an idea, an image, dim, half seen. His heart leaped up, for he knew that once again what had seemed like an end was only a beginning.

He stood still, his knee pressed against the drawer. The sunlight came slantwise into the room and made a broad bar of golden light across the carpet, across the brown wood of the desk, across his hand and cuff resting on the desk. The room was quiet, but through the open window he could hear the sounds of the world, Mary's voice from across the road, a distant train, the bark of a dog, a bird singing in the tiny garden, the fussy throb of a motorcycle somewhere behind the house.

In that moment of time, while Mary was running across the road, he had a vision of the whole world moving, not towards an end, but towards a beginning; of life shifting, changing, gleaming, darkening, but always going on to that beginning, which was so far beyond human conception that sometimes it could come no nearer to it than an end. He saw all living creatures like adventurers setting sail upon an infinite sea. That which they were seeking

was at once familiar and strange, since It was the Light from Which they had sprung, and to Which they were returning. The Light was hidden from them, and only refractions of It were visible in the darkness—"Stars like globes"—but It was there at the end, as It had been there at the beginning. "Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End." The worship of all his being found issue in words familiar to his mind:

"My soul doth magnify the Lord . . ."

He shut the drawer to with his knee and went out to meet Joyce and the children in the garden.

END

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